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ABSTRACT

This 19th issue of "Notes Plus" contains descriptions of original, unpublished teaching practices, and of adapted ideas. Under the Ideas from the Classroom section, the August 2001 issue contains the following materials: "Imitation: The Sincerest Form of Flattery" (Anna M. Parks); "Stories That Make Us Who We Are" (Therese M. Willis and Kathleen Pierce); "The Literacy Project" (Eliana Osborn); "Imaginary Character Conversations" (Patricia J. Crist); "Sticky Notes to the Rescue" (Ann Christine Federico); "Daily Time Cards for Discussion and Dialogue" (Carla Gubitz Jankowski); and "Discussing Gender Roles and 'The Scarlet Letter'" (Portia McJunkin). Under the Web Resources section is: "Handy Sites for English Teachers." Under the Focus on Conflict Resolution section is: "Six Steps toward Conflict Resolution" (William V. Costanzo). Under the Focus on Literature section is: "Exploring Relationships in 'A Streetcar Named Desire'" (Leslie Oster). Under the Focus on Writing section is: "Thirteen Ways of Looking at an Onyx Bird" (Martha Kruse). Under the Teacher Talks section are: "World Poetry Anthologies"; and "Teaching 'A Rose for Emily'." Under the Preview section is: "The Puritans Have Nothing to Do with My Life" (Karla Kuutila Shuell). Under the Letters section is: "A Poetry Lesson That Teaches Trust" (Mitzi Merrill). Under the Ideas from the Classroom section of the October 2001 issue are the following materials: "Introducing Reluctant Poets to Poetry" (Kristen M. Burgess); "Snapshot Connections" (Lea Ann Ponder); "A Simple Thank You" (Deb Cates); "Satiric Town Meeting" (Arlen H. Kimmelman); "Motivating Students to Do Their Own Research" (Katherine P. McFarland); "'Finders' Teach Vocabulary" (Jeana Rock); "Thirteen Tips for Supporting Student Teachers" (Heather Temple); "Using a Memory Web Chart to Write Poetry" (Guadalupe G. McCall); "A Case for Caribbean Literature in the English Curriculum" (Paula Edwards); "Creating Community through Photography and Student Work" (George T. Tennison, III); and "Senior Valedictory Videos" (Carole Ronane). Under the Web Resources section is: "Thematic

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Literature Units." Under the Focus on Writing section is: "Creating Independence through Group Writing" (Christine Hansen). Under the Teacher Talk section is: "Teaching about the American Civil War." Under the Excerpts section is: "Helping Students Love Language through Authentic Vocabulary Instruction." Under the Ideas from the Classroom section in the January 2002 issue are the following materials: "Listening for 'Sizzling Pickles'" (Patricia Mosco Holloway); "Making Magic with Shakespeare" (Linda H. Light); "Experimenting with Point of View" (Leah K. Esker); "Characters and Speculations" (Gerard Landry); "Relaxation Leads to Expressive Writing" (Lisa White); "Dear Wendy" (Carol Kopacz); "Experiencing the 1920s" (Brenda Eisenhardt); "Imagined Conversations" (Jennifer Shorter-Lee and Vicki Catlin); and "'Star Wars' and the Hero's Journey" (Andrea Lee Permenter). Under the Teacher Talk section is: "Lord of the Flies." Under the Web Resources section are: Using Poetry Activities for Increased Understanding"; and "Help with Bibliographies." Under the Classroom Solutions section is: "Bulletin Board Review" (Karen R. Bowie). Under the Focus on Media Literacy section is: "Examining Images of Men and Women in the Media" (Krista Ediger). Under the Excerpts section is: "Eavesdropping--and Other Everyday, Familiar Forms of Inquiry." Contains notes. Under the Ideas from the Classroom section in the April 2002 issue are the following materials: "Learning How to Give Constructive Feedback" (Meredith A. Fisher); "Writing Mouth-Watering Descriptions" (Theodore Hamilton); "Shake Up Your Thinking" (Kim Martin Long); "Story Squares" (Margaret A. Lee); "Getting to Know a Fictional Character" (Susan Altland); "Sentence Combining for Complexity" (Kathryn Parrott); "Metaphors as Feedback" (Mary T. Lane); "The Connections Concept" (Michael Sullivan); "Discriminating between Fact and Opinion" (Eileen Talbett); and "'Romeo and Juliet'--One More Story with an Unhappy Ending" (Sherrill Y. Rayford). Under the Web Resource section is: "Photographs from Shakespeare's Plays." Under the Focus on Poetry section is: "Found Poets" (Kathleen M. Elias). Under the Traci's Lists of Ten is: "Ten National Poetry Month Activities" (Traci Gardner). Under the Teacher Talk section is: "Coming of Age." Under the Excerpts section is: "What Do I Teach for 90 Minutes?" Contains notes. (NKA)

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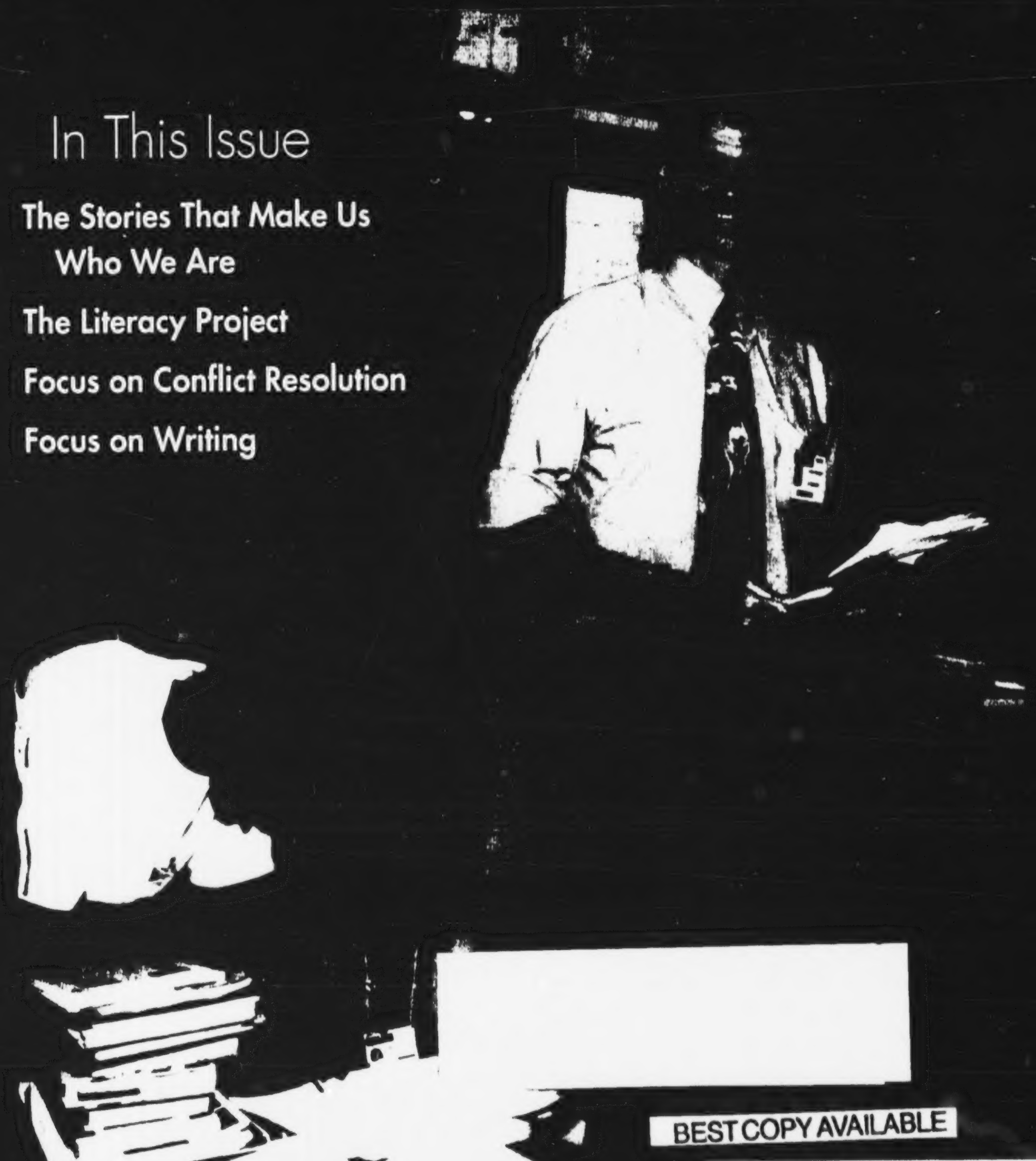
CLASSROOM NOTES

A QUARTERLY OF TEACHING IDEAS

AUGUST 2001



In This Issue

The Stories That Make Us Who We Are

The Literacy Project

Focus on Conflict Resolution

Focus on Writing

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From the National Council of Teachers of English

CLASSROOM NOTES *Plus*

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Call for Submissions

CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS invites your descriptions of original, unpublished teaching practices for consideration. In the case of an adapted idea, we ask that you clearly identify any sources that deserve mention.

To make your description as useful as possible to CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS readers, we suggest that you consider questions like these as you prepare your submission: What are the goals of the activity or classroom practice? What makes it especially meaningful for you and your students? How do you introduce this idea to students? In what ways do their interests and ideas help direct the course of this activity? What natural progression does this activity usually follow? How are students encouraged to reflect on their learning? How do you judge this practice to be effective? How would you change your implementation of it in the future?

Please submit double-spaced, typed copy. Receipt of your submission will be acknowledged by postcard, but acknowledgment does not guarantee publication. We are unable to return manuscripts, so please keep a copy. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

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Many of the e-mail contributions in this issue are reprinted from NCTE-talk, an electronic discussion group sponsored by NCTE. To read interesting discussions on a variety of topics related to secondary teaching, visit the NCTE-talk archives at http://www.ncte.org/lists/ncte-talk/archives.html or click on Site Map from the NCTE home page (www.ncte.org) and choose NCTE-talk Archives.

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To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn

—bell hooks

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- 32 Ways to Start the Year Off Right
- Film at Eleven: Literary Newscasts
- The Puritans Have Nothing to Do with My Life
- Teacher Talk: Using Art in the Classroom

IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Welcome to a new school year and a new issue of CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS. This issue includes strategies for helping students analyze writers' style, explore family stories, practice writing dialogue, and use quotation marks, plus two classroom management techniques that involve the use of daily time cards and sticky notes.

Three "Focus" features provide inspiration for the study of conflict resolution, Tennessee Williams's *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*, and writing.

And new on the *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* Web site this month, you'll find these additional resources: "32 Ways to Start the Year Off Right," "Film at Eleven: Literary Newscasts," "Teacher Talk: Using Art in the Classroom," and "The Puritans Have Nothing To Do with My Life," an excerpt from *MAKING AMERICAN LITERATURES IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE* (NCTE, 2001).

Imitation: The Sincerest Form of Flattery

This is an activity in which students explore what makes writing effective by analyzing a writer's style and imitating that style. I've been using this idea for so long that I cannot remember from whom I borrowed it.

The objectives are to analyze a writer's style and voice; to practice and internalize concepts of syntax, punctuation, and grammar; and to increase writing fluency.

The first step is to ask students to come to class with a paragraph or longer passage by an author they like, are familiar with, or admire. This passage could even be from an author whose writing they find somewhat intimidating or confusing. You will need to keep copies of passages on hand for those who fail to bring their own samples to class.

As a variation, you could have copies of paragraphs or longer passages by authors you have selected for reason of instruction—such as Annie Dilliard for use of sensory details, William Faulkner for exploration of complicated syntax, Rudolfo Anaya for evoking a vivid sense of childhood, Andy Roonie for use of sarcasm, Zora Neal Hurston for folkloric elements, Ernest Hemingway for study of concise language, Amy Tan for interactions that illustrate complex family relationships, James Thurber for use of humor, and so on.

You need not use such well-known authors. Your local paper's editorial page can provide a wealth of authors to imitate, as can popular magazines. You could begin a collection of these paragraphs and passages and prepare a handout for students that offers many choices.

Next, assign students the task of writing in the style and voice of the author whose passage they've chosen to imitate. Encourage them to stick closely to the author's syntax and diction as they compose an original piece in the sense of the plot or subject matter. For some students, simply copying the passages at first may be the best they can do. However, the more often the opportunity to imitate is given, the more likely those students are to begin adding more of their own material.

The last step, which is optional, but advised, is this: if you have provided the handout of passages from which students may choose, a follow-up activity in which students must determine which author others are imitating gives all students an opportunity to look closely at the style of several authors at one time. Unidentified student pieces can either be posted or passed around for others to compare to the passages on the handout. You can turn this into a game or contest of sorts if you can get students to agree not to tell which pieces they've imitated.

Anna M. Parks, Norwell High School, Ossian, Indiana

The Stories That Make Us Who We Are

Discovering the connections between their own personal stories and other, broader stories of human experience can help adolescents define themselves within a larger world.

One way to help students do this is to expose them to quality literature from a wide variety of cultures and times, and engage them in discussion and writing about how the people, events, and stories in these works compare to their own lives. And, as a corollary, students can discover these connections by thinking about their own stories. This project on stories and family heritage helps students to think about stories, events, and elements of family culture that are important to who they are.

This assignment needs to be handled sensitively so that all students feel comfortable with it. Students can be encouraged to think not just in terms of family stories but of stories that they were brought up with, told by relatives or friends, so that whatever a student's family situation, he or she will be able to identify stories that were important and memorable in childhood.

Guidelines for Students

Think of stories that were told to you as a child by members of your family or that you heard repeatedly from friends or relatives as a child, and pick one to retell to the class. This should be an original story about something that happened in the life of a relative or friend, and which was

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memorable enough to be told and retold many times. Your story may be humorous, tragic, instructive, or any variation on these. It may be about a dangerous adventure, a strange coincidence, a surprise, a catastrophe—some event that is so special or funny or sad that people repeat it over and over.

Introduce your story by addressing the following questions:

- Why is this story remembered and repeated?
- Who told you this story? How many times do you think you have heard it?
- When was this story usually shared (at mealtime, at bedtime, while traveling, etc.)?
- What does this story say about the person to whom it happened? What does it say about the family or group in which it is told?
- How is your culture or the environment in which you grew up reflected in your story?
- What do you like best or find most meaningful in this story?
- Why did you select this story to share with us?

Students write their stories down and then tell them to the class from memory or from notes. The audience sometimes has questions to ask, and afterwards we try to identify themes that run through the stories, such as the way parents or grandparents met, immigration stories, close escapes from accidents or natural disasters, how someone or something was lost and later found, and so on. Students appreciate the chance to retell stories that are important to them, and in reflecting on why they are meaningful, they learn something about themselves.

Therese M. Willis, Haddonfield Memorial High School, Haddonfield, New Jersey, and Kathleen Pierce, Souhagen, Amherst, New Hampshire.

The Literacy Project

In my senior English classes I often get a feeling of panic, wondering if my students are ready to go out on their own and keep learning. I teach at an alternative high school for students with a wide variety of personal issues, from having children to having done time in foreign prisons. They all have one thing in common, though: they are at my school because they decided to give their education a second chance. That understanding of the importance of education has been a good connection point for us.

My refrain through all the subjects we discuss in class is the importance of reading. I truly believe that literacy is the most surefire way to improve one's life. After reading *I Hear America Reading* by Jim Burke, I was inspired by his idea of soliciting letters from the community about the importance of reading in people's lives, and sharing these with his students. What emerged for me was a weeklong emphasis I simply call the Literacy Project.

I sent out an e-mail request to a few of my friends and family members, to be passed on, for their insights about reading. I collected a packet of about 25 letters, all offering different perspectives on life and books. I also spent a few hours one night at the local bookstore, interviewing people on video about what their favorite book was and why. Participants ranged from a four-year-old to a homeless man to a retired college professor. Out of those invited, only one person was less than enthusiastic about participating.

On Monday I introduce the project by telling my class that I believe many people other than English teachers think reading is important, and that we will be trying to figure out why during the week. We read several letters and discuss the reasons that each person has found books to be a lifelong interest. Then I explain the two-part assignment.

Students will each interview ten people about their favorite books. These interviews, which are to include demographic information about each person, constitute Part One. Part Two is a short reflective essay: what does each student think? We then watch the videos of my sample interviews and discuss the common elements in what such a diverse group of people say about why they love a particular book. This is fun and my students always appreciate the fact that I've done the same assignment that I am asking of them.

The rest of the week we read excerpts from Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*, both about the turning point that writing and reading, respectively, provided for the authors. We also read more of the letters from the community, talking about different genres and why different people read: some to escape, some to learn, some to explore.

I was hopeful about this project, it excited me and had such potential. But until I read the essays my students turned in, I didn't realize how beneficial it would be. So many students, even those who were reading their first book from start to finish during this semester, pointed out that reading is absolutely necessary to life. Some talked about how they were trying to increase their skills so that they will be more successful, others wrote about favorite books that touched their lives at particular times.

Giving my students a chance to hear what other people think about reading has been valuable, and synthesizing the experience in a reflective essay was effective in helping them to realize what they already knew at some level—that reading can be important in everyday life, and can also be something to enjoy.

Eliana Osborn, Vista School, Yuma, Arizona

Imaginary Character Conversations

Tired of observing my middle school students' bored, glassy-eyed stares when I taught quotation marks, I created a writing activity based on imaginary conversations between famous characters. This activity provides practice writing dialogues and using quotation marks, in addition to stimulating the imagination and providing an opportunity for low-key presentations.

First I printed the names of famous characters from history, television, music, politics, literature, cartoons, sports, and current events on index cards, one per card, and placed them face down in a box. Students in study hall helped me brainstorm the original character list until we had generated about 100 names, including Jennifer Lopez, Vanna White, Harriet Tubman, Saddam Hussein, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Ricky Martin, Al Gore, Donald Duck, Oliver Twist, Michael Jordan, Brittany Spears, and many others. I also printed my own name on one card.

In class, I explained that students were going to write a dialogue between two surprise characters. To model the activity, I drew two character cards—Lassie and Regis Philbin—and the class brainstormed a possible conversation the two might have. Each student then drew two names and read them aloud, so that everyone could hear the outlandish combinations, such as Michael Jordan and Godzilla or Donald Trump and Ebenezer Scrooge.

Anyone who drew an unfamiliar name could research the name on the class computer. I added some "Free Choice" cards with notations such as: any actor/actress of your choice, any sports figure of your choice, or any literary character of your choice. The selection of character names and discussion of possible dialogues was lively and fun.

Prior to class, I had written on the board the page numbers where information on quotation marks could be found in the grammar book. I have discovered that using the grammar book as a reference tool, rather than doing all the monotonous exercises, works better with my middle school students.

I pointed this quotation mark reference out to my students as they began working, and circulated, checking to see if anyone needed one-on-one help with quotation marks.

The dialogues were due the next day, and not only had everyone completed the assignment (a minor miracle), but a flurry of hands went up when I asked who wanted to read theirs aloud. The conversations were hysterical. Here are a couple examples:

Michael Jordan Meets Mia Hamm

One cool summer day Mia Hamm was jogging to the supermarket to buy some Gatorade. At the same time Michael Jordan was buying some Gatorade, but there was only one more bottle left, so Mia and Mike got into an argument about who should get it. They finally came up with a way to solve the problem. They decided to race for it. So they started the race.

Halfway through the race Michael Jordan said, "I'm not stopping. Are you stopping?"

Mia Hamm then replied, "No, I'm not stopping."

Mike then asked, "Are you sure you're not stopping?"

Mia Hamm then looked at Mike and said, "Of course, I'm not stopping."

Then she went along and asked, "Why? Do you want to stop?"

Mike replied, "Not if you aren't."

So they agreed to stop. When they reached the store, a little bird named "Tweety" took the Gatorade.

A Conversation with Oprah and Lassie

Lassie is on Oprah's talk show. She is asking Lassie questions.

"Are you starring in any new movies, Lassie?" asked Oprah.

Lassie replied, "No, I'm not, Oprah, but I wish I was. There are a lot of good movies out there that need a dog as the main character."

"Like what?" asked Oprah.

"Well, Bring It On should have a dog as the main character and a story line about dogs competing for a bone. *The Cell* should have a dog in it when they are trying to figure out why dogs didn't rule the earth. And Space Cowboys should have a dog as Clint Eastwood and it should be called Space Dogs," answered Lassie.

"Cool," replied Oprah. "I have to ask you, what are you looking for in an owner?"

"I am looking for a person who is nice to me, treats me well, feeds me real good and takes me for walks. I would also like an owner who lets me run free, so I can go save little kids," answered Lassie.

"Oh yeah, what do you think of children getting in trouble and having you come to the rescue?" asked Oprah.

"Well, I like being needed, but I can't save everyone all the time. I need some personal days. You know, to catch up with my feelings," said Lassie.

"I never knew you were so personal," Oprah explained. "I thought that you were mean and nasty, but only saved kids for the attention."

"I mean, it does give you a lot of bones and places to sleep at night and food, but I also do it because I am nice and it is fun doing all those daring things with no one telling you that you can't," answered Lassie.

"Well, that is all the time that we have for today. Tune in tomorrow to listen to me speak with Garfield. Thanks for watching. Thank you too, Lassie, for being our guest of the day. Bye."

When I asked the students if they wanted to draw different names and repeat the assignment, the majority enthusiastically agreed. For the second practice session, I asked each student to work with a partner or two, each drawing

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a different name, and writing a dialogue together that could be presented as a skit.

Over the next couple class periods, students worked together on this in class, using peer reviews to check for accurate quotation mark use. Some students added props and rudimentary costumes, and the skits were a hit (especially the one about me and King Kong.)

When I assessed student knowledge of correct quotation mark use, I found that they did better after this activity than after my drills of previous years, and I can see why. The high-interest activity created a need in students to know how to use quotation marks correctly, and being in charge of their own learning, they were motivated by their desire to produce quality dialogues.

Patricia J. Crist, Glenbrook Middle School, Longmeadow, Massachusetts

Sticky Notes to the Rescue

It was project turn-in day and my students were arriving early to hand me their work. In my case, this amounted to 150 projects, and as they piled up, I gradually realized the daunting task that lay ahead—with only 45 minutes per period, it would take a week for all the students to present their work. The class would become bored and restless by the second day, and I would end up cutting the presentations short.

As I struggled with this all-too-familiar scenario, I figured out a way to harness the creative energy of my students, maximize my teaching time, and give my students a tremendous boost of self esteem. Sticky notes to the rescue! I planned a two-day lesson: "Group Rotations with Sticky Note Comments" followed by "Next-Day Read-Aloud." I dove right in with first period, giving the plan a trial run.

My classroom is arranged in seven clusters of cooperative groups. Students had been trained all year to score each other's essays, write positive comments on papers, and listen to me validate their writing.

My eighth graders had just completed a project composed of original poems and illustrations. It was vital that they share their work, but being 14-year-olds, they were very critical and reluctant readers. I gave a brief explanation of our purpose: to read everyone's project, to respond positively, to share aloud only with your table. Group One was told to leave their projects at their home table and proceed to Group Two's table. Group Two did the same and moved to Group Three's table, and so on. Finally, Group Seven moved to Group One's table. Now each student was facing a project written by another person.

Each table was supplied with pads of sticky notes. After laying the ground rules (no negative remarks, sticky notes go on the project—not your neighbor's shirt) students were asked to read through the projects at that table and write a positive remark on a sticky note next to the poem or picture they liked best.

I gave the groups about five minutes at each table while I circulated around the room and observed their comments. After the time was up, the students rotated to the next table in line and began reading another set of projects. By the end of the period, every student in the room had read approximately 30 different projects and responded to all of them in writing.

I was totally taken aback by the success of this assignment. The energy of the interactions was infectious with hilarious yet sensitive comments. "Your word choice is precise," "This poem makes me cry," "Mrs. Fed would like your use of metaphors," "Toe jam is gross but it cracks me up!" Little by little, certain poems were generating similar responses—amazement, laughter, surprise. Students were calling across the room, "Hey, Jimmy, I like your surfing poem!" "You gotta read Kristy's poem about the lost child!" "Spencer's is a gross-out, but it's effective!"

The projects were now burgeoning with sticky notes and all kinds of genuine, amusing comments. I marveled at my students' wit and depth. Alas, the 45-minute period was over, and I hurriedly collected all the projects. Although the students clamored to read their projects, I did not hand them back that day for two reasons: the rotations were completed just when the class period ended, and I needed to read through the comments myself to make sure no one wrote an inappropriate remark.

Aside from a few silly remarks, the notes were appropriate, intelligent, and creative. An unexpected gift was how student writing validated what I had been teaching all year.

When my students arrived the next morning, they were greeted by the aroma of fresh donuts. I had converted my room into a Groovy Poetry Garden, with pillows and beach blankets spread out, chairs and desks shoved aside. Sitting in a circle on the floor, the students were now allowed to read their projects crammed with sticky notes. They carefully read over all the comments by their peers. Remember how hard it is to get teenagers to volunteer reading their own work? This method solved that problem for me, because in no time, the class was urging Kristy to read her poem about the car accident, Spencer to delight us with his "Ode to the Toe" and Joey to show us his artwork featuring goofy sea monkeys. No longer reluctant and afraid, my students had been given a very potent dose of self esteem—affirmation by their peers.

This activity accomplished several important goals. First, every student participated by reading at least 30 projects each. Second, students responded in writing to the work

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they read, focusing on literary elements, author's purpose, and style. In addition, by making the comments positive, I was teaching the class kindness as well as effective writing skills. My students volunteered to read their poetry with enthusiasm and excitement. And finally, I was able to accomplish all these goals in just two days.

Ann Christine Federico, Hidden Oaks Middle School, Palm City, Florida

Handy Sites for English Teachers

Whether you're a new teacher or a veteran, you'll find these Web sites useful sources of information.

High School Hub
http://highschoolhub.org/hub/english.cfm
A collection of links that includes grammar and writing guides, literature and literature study guides, poetry, and more.

Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet
http://shakespeare.palomar.edu
The portal to everything Shakespeare. Includes links to full texts of his works, quizzes, and essays.

Edsitement
http://edsitement.neh.fed.us
A peer-reviewed gateway to online resources in the humanities. Includes links to lesson plans.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication (ERIC)
http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec
The ERIC Clearinghouse creates abstracts for many journals on English and language arts. This site includes bibliographies, digests, and lesson plans.

Creative Writing for Teens
http://kidswriting.about.com/teens/teenwriting/
This guided site for teen writers includes articles on the writing craft, writing ideas, and grammar and construction tutorials.

Compiled by NCTE Librarian Cheri Cameron.

Daily Time Cards for Discussion and Dialogue

I began using a daily time card to keep track of attendance and participation, but it has evolved into a way to help me maintain a pulse on the class, direct more meaningful discussions, and talk personally with my students. It also ensures that each day students write at least a sentence or two in which they answer a question, restate something important from the day's activities, voice an opinion, or use their imagination.

Our Daily Time Card is photocopied on brightly colored paper and includes the dates for several weeks, two lines for each day's response, a small space for teacher's remarks, and columns for subtracting and adding points. I distribute copies of the card at the beginning of class and write the question/comment of the day on the board.

The question may relate to a reading or writing assignment (What was the best holiday gift you ever received?) or involve the use of recent vocabulary words (Would you rather have *indulgent* or *stern* parents? Give a reason why.). Completing analogies is a good springboard to poetry (A bird is to wings as ________ is to ________?).

Sometimes I wait until the last two minutes to ask a question about something students need to remember (When is your speech outline due?). I might ask *them* to ask a question or express an opinion so I can see what we should cover the next day (What question would you like to ask this character? or What was the most difficult part of today's assignment?).

I always make a point to ask that students respond in at least one *complete* sentence (and two or three if they can fit them in the space allotted) and that they include a reason when they respond to any "yes" or "no" questions. At the end of class the students put their time cards into an assigned bin. Because of the bright color, few get lost, and students quickly develop the habit of turning them in. In fact, my students often remind me when I haven't given the question or comment.

Reading through the sentences gives me insight into students' needs and helps me direct the next day's lesson. I also begin to dialogue with students individually by occasionally writing responses in my remarks section or on a sticky note attached to the card. The time cards are also useful references for students at the end of the quarter when they write their self-evaluations.

Carla Gubitz Jankowski, Morton East High School, Cicero, Illinois

Discussing Gender Roles and *The Scarlet Letter*

Here's a teaching idea I use to enrich discussion of *The Scarlet Letter* and engage students in critical thinking.

We read *The Scarlet Letter* as a book-in-a-day. (This is an old cooperative learning approach, in which each student is assigned a chapter to read and to "teach" to the class.)

There's a lot in the novel about Dimmesdale's search for self, and I also have fun with the idea of Hester, a woman, as the stronger character.

It's valuable to get students to think and talk about gender roles, what part they play in the novel, and what effect they may have in their own lives. If you have access to back issues of *Scholastic Voice*, the April 3, 1992, issue included a provocative quiz entitled "Are You Sexist?" The quiz included 13 multiple-choice questions such as the two below:

In school you learn about a lot more famous male artists and writers than female ones. You think that's probably because:

a. Men are smarter than women.

b. It's just a coincidence that more men than women create good art.

c. For much of history, most women didn't have the opportunity to express themselves creatively.

d. It's mostly men who have decided what is great art.

The boys' basketball team has a new coach this year, Ms. Fraiser. Many of the players are very upset. If you were a boy on this team, you would:

a. Quit. What do women know about sports?

b. Stay on the team, but resolve to play your way, not hers.

c. Think nothing of it—coaching skills don't have anything to do with gender.

d. Be skeptical, but give her a chance to prove herself.

During our study of *The Scarlet Letter*, I ask my students to take the quiz and we spend a class period or two discussing our answers and relating them to the characters and plot in the book.

If you don't have access to this quiz, you could easily create some similar questions based on hypothetical situations. Each question should offer a range of answers that require students to examine their own assumptions and beliefs about gender roles for men and women.

Such questions can lend themselves to lively discussions, and help students to think about issues like fairness, double standards, and biological destiny. This discussion also helps students gain insight into the characters and events of *The Scarlet Letter*, as they consider questions like "What were Hester's options? What are the gender roles as portrayed in the novel? Do you see evidence of double standards for men and women? Was Hester treated fairly? If the events of this story had taken place in modern times, would the ending have been different? How do you think the story should have ended? If you had a chance to talk to the townspeople, what would you say?"

This activity could be effective with any works of literature in which the roles and societal expectations for men and women are an issue.

Portia McJunkin, Darlington County Adult Education, Darlington, South Carolina

FOCUS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Six Steps Toward Conflict Resolution

Many teachers would like to counter what Deborah Tannen calls "The Argument Culture." We recognize that teaching students traditional principles of argument may perpetuate the kind of adversarial thinking that erupts around us all too often: in aggressive newspaper headlines, on confrontational television shows, in court rooms, and in schoolyards across the country.

An alternative is to teach the skills of conflict resolution. What follows is a sequence of six classroom exercises leading to a writing assignment in which students are asked to mediate in the resolution of a conflict instead of arguing "persuasively" for one side. (These materials are adapted from a forthcoming textbook for first-year college writers to be published by McGraw-Hill, but will also be valuable and effective with high school students; the language in the writing assignment may need to be adapted for use with younger students.)

Exercises

1. The Language of Conflict

Topic: How does our society represent conflict through language?

Group Exercise: Look for examples of conflict in newspaper headlines (battle imagery, boxing metaphors). List sayings that express "common wisdom" about conflict ("If you're not a winner, you're a loser." "There are two sides

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to every argument."). Compare popular television shows dealing with controversy (*FACE-OFF*, *HARD BALL*, *JERRY SPRINGER*).

Discuss: What beliefs about conflict do these examples represent and perpetuate?

Belief Scale: List some common beliefs about conflict (conflicts lead to fights, the world is made up of winners and losers). Create a scale (one to ten) for each, asking students to say how strongly they agree or disagree. Discuss where these beliefs come from.

2. Attentive Listening

Exercise in Pairs: One student interviews the other with four questions: "What is a recent conflict you (or someone you know) was involved in?" "What was the conflict about? Who was involved? What was the outcome?" Each interview is conducted twice. The first time, the interviewer shows as little interest as possible (avoiding eye contact, yawning, interrupting, folding arms). The second time, the interviewer practices attentive listening (focused, caring, empathetic). Then the pair switches roles, the interviewer becoming the interviewee.

Discuss: What was it like to be listened to half-heartedly? What were the signs of inattentive listening? What difference did attentive listening make in how you felt and what you said? What cues (tone, body language, choice of words) enabled you to speak differently the second time? Were there any misunderstandings triggered by language?

How Conflicts Grow: Make an event tree (or flow chart) for each conflict to show how one event led to another. How easy is it to trace the conflict back to its origins? What contributed most to the conflict? If the conflict is over, what led to its resolution? If not, where do you think it will lead?

3. Problem Solving

The Human Knot: Eight volunteers stand in a circle facing each other. Each person reaches across with the right hand to hold another person's right hand. Then everyone reaches with the left hand for the left hand of a different person. This forms the knot. The goal is to untangle the knot without unclasping hands. Try this exercise twice, with and without outside help.

Discuss: What did you notice about the way this problem was solved? How well did an outsider's perspective help?

Tangled Roles: The knot exercise is a variation of "the human knot" that accounts for individual needs, or underlying motives. Before beginning, give each person an instruction card. Each card will list the same common goal of untying the knot, but three or four will also include secondary "needs," such as "you need to be in charge," "capture the attention of someone in the group," "be sure that everyone is happy." The people with these needs will play those roles during the untangling.

Discuss: Did you notice people behaving differently? Can you identify any special interests or needs that might explain this behavior? How did these needs affect the group's ability to solve the common problem?

4. Positions and Interests

Return to the conflicts identified during the listening exercise. This time, the goal is to analyze the conflict, separating positions from interests.

What positions did each person in the conflict take? What interests (underlying needs or motives) might have led to these positions? For example, in a conflict over curfews, the mother might take the position "be home by ten," the daughter's position might be to challenge the curfew, and these positions might escalate into threats and reprisals. The mother might be seen as controlling or as concerned for her daughter's safety (her interests). The daughter's interests might include a desire to have more freedom or to be "like all the other girls."

Positions are usually easier to identify because they are spoken or acted out. Interests often require some analysis. Asking why positions were taken in the first place can often uncover needs and interests motivated by past experience ("The last time you stayed out late, you got into trouble.") or future goals ("I want to be accepted by my friends.")

5. Expanding Options

Group Exercise: Select a conflict for which you have identified the positions people take and their underlying needs, and brainstorm as many options as you can. The object is to invent solutions beyond the positions taken. What other outcomes are possible? For the first stage of this exercise, be open to all possibilities, no matter how far-fetched. Turn off the censor. Judgments and decisions will come later.

Consider these prompts to help generate ideas:

- Can the pie be cut in different ways? (One person likes the crust; the other likes the filling.)
- Can the pie be expanded? (Add more apples, raisins, or dough.)
- What would different kinds of people suggest? (a child, a biker, a business executive, a romantic, Seinfeld, Oprah?)
- How might the problem be met with avoidance, postponement, aggression, or assertiveness?
- Up the ante: what if your life depended on a resolution?

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6. Choosing Alternatives

Establish objective standards for judging which options would work best. What basic principles seem most reasonable and fair? For example, if the conflict is about a student's grade, what measures for assessing the student's work would be impartial and appropriate?

Display these standards in a flip chart, on the board, or on a computer screen. Look for areas of mutual gain. Involve all parties in the selection of criteria.

Then comb through the ideas generated in the previous exercise, applying these standards you agreed on to find a reasonable resolution to the conflict.

Writing Assignment: Resolving a Conflict

Student Guidelines

When two sides find it difficult to agree in an ongoing dispute, they sometimes seek the assistance of a mediator, a third party who is not involved in the dispute. The mediator's role is to help both sides reach a resolution. This may be some middle ground satisfactory to everyone or an entirely new solution that the disputing sides could not envision on their own. Because the mediator is not attached to any particular position and because the mediator's goal is a fair, mutually acceptable resolution, this approach often produces positive results.

Roger Fisher and William Ury give a good example in their bestseller, *GETTING TO YES*:

> Consider the story of two men quarreling in a library. One wants the window open and the other wants it closed. They bicker back and forth about how much to leave it open: a crack, halfway, three-quarters of the way. No solution satisfies them both.
>
> Enter the librarian. She asks one why he wants the window open: "To get some fresh air." She asks the other why he wants it closed: "To avoid the draft." After thinking a minute, she opens wide a window in the next room, bringing in fresh air without a draft. (40)

For this paper, you act as the mediator between opposing sides of a debate. You seek to understand the positions of both sides, to clarify their underlying interests, and to appreciate their immediate and long-range concerns. At the same time, you invent new options that might resolve the disagreement and consider them in the light of objective standards. In this way, you get to practice principles and skills of conflict resolution that will serve you well in nearly every arena of your daily life.

Your topic may be a personal disagreement (like a dispute over a salary, a possession, or a grade) or a global conflict (between hostile nations, competing ideologies, or groups with different goals, like ecologists and land developers). Choose a topic in which you have a genuine interest but about which you can be reasonably objective. Your purpose is not to take sides; it is to reconcile the opposing sides.

The essay should include a clear description of the conflict and present each side's point of view. You might begin with a brief history of the dispute to show what led to the problem. Since there are at least two sides to every argument, you should summarize the main positions of each side. Find out what the people involved really think by investigating their beliefs through reading, live interviews, broadcasts, or the Internet. Try to present each position as accurately and strongly as if it were your own. Show that you understand not only what the conflicting sides believe and why they believe it but also how they feel.

The theory of "principled negotiation" outlined in *GETTING TO YES* offers a useful format for this essay.

Although Fisher and Ury stress the importance of understanding the emotions involved in any problem, they caution mediators to separate the problem from the people. They also advise mediators to separate positions from their underlying motives. That is what the librarian does when she discovers that one reader wants fresh air while the other wants to avoid a draft. By identifying the original interests that led to their opposing positions, she is able to find a solution invisible to both.

Fisher and Ury describe two more steps that are useful in any conflict resolution: brainstorming a number of options and judging them by objective standards. The options should serve the mutual interests of both parties. The standards for selecting the most promising option should be fair and objective.

Suggested References

GETTING TO YES: NEGOTIATING AGREEMENT WITHOUT GIVING IN by Roger Fisher and William Ury. Penguin, 1981.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE by Daniel Goleman. Bantam, 1995.

THE ARGUMENT CULTURE: MOVING FROM DEBATE TO DIALOGUE by Deborah Tannen. Random House, 1998.

William V. Costanzo, SUNY/Westchester Community College, Valhalla, New York

William V. Costanzo is the author of *READING THE MOVIES: TWELVE GREAT FILMS ON VIDEO AND HOW TO TEACH THEM* (NCTE, 1992).

FOCUS ON LITERATURE

Exploring Relationships in *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

Teenagers always respond to the topic of love, and they're generally rather "savvy" about both its positive and negative aspects, which are major issues in the classic American play, *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* by Tennessee Williams.

I use an introductory activity in which we respond to the question, "How would you know if someone was trying to 'move in on' your boyfriend or girlfriend?"

We post "clues" or indicators of predatory behavior on the board and discuss them, and then we respond to the question, "What would you do about it?" The answers to this query range from being nasty to ignoring the predatory behavior and trusting the boyfriend/girlfriend.

Discussing this issue has always generated a lot of excitement in the classroom, and it prepares students to understand Blanche's behavior towards men.

Next, I ask students, working in small groups, to create a metaphor for love on one sheet of 8½" x 11" construction paper, using markers or colored pencils. The poster should read, "Love is . . . " and present the metaphor as a picture. This work takes only 10 to 15 minutes, after which each group explains their metaphor to the class.

My students have created some wonderful metaphors, such as the following:

"Love is a butterfly" . . . because it has to grow for a long time and then it emerges, transformed, but is very delicate.

"Love is the best friendship" (showing two hands joined) . . . because you can discuss anything with your girlfriend/boyfriend.

"Love is a snowfall" . . . because it is beautiful and sparkling, but can easily turn to slush and be ruined.

After this introductory segment, we read the complete play aloud, act out some scenes, and discuss the characters' personalities, motivations, and relationships, focusing on some of the most highly charged speeches.

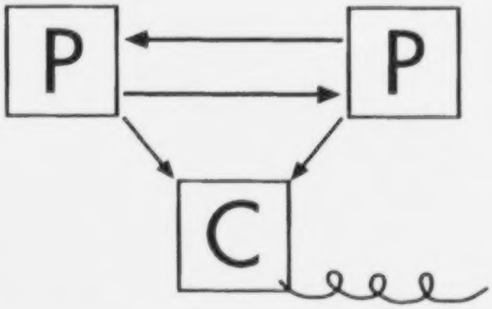
I purposely keep the discussions at the end of each scene brief because of the culminating activity described below.

In the culminating activity, students work in small groups to create a visual presentation of one issue from the play and to show how that issue affects the characters' relationships.

The key to this project is that the visual presentation can not be a representational picture or collage. It must be a schematic diagram designed to reveal characters' actions and motives, and their effects on other characters. The finished product must also include several significant quotations and/or excerpts of dialogue that help support the diagram.

The process of planning and creating this diagram helps students synthesize what they have discovered about the characters in the play.

To give students an idea of one possible schematic diagram, I draw the following figure on the board:



I explain that this diagram shows two parents in conflict over a child (see arrows between the parents), who are each applying pressure on the child separately (see arrows towards the child), causing the child to act out or misbehave (see curling symbol).

I stress that this is just one example of how a few symbols can be used to show relationships and tensions between people, and that many other symbols and formats could be used to indicate interactions, positive and negative effects, and so forth.

Students may need to brainstorm additional ideas before they feel comfortable with this exercise, but soon they are ready to exchange ideas, try out some unusual graphics, and invent a schematic diagram that clearly illustrates the characters' relationships and motivations.

I give students a copy of the handout page (see page 11).

Students draw their diagrams on easel paper, find one or more quotations to support their views, and prepare written responses to the questions on the handout page. What follows is an example of one diagram that was produced by students in my class.

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Exploring Relationships in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Handout Sheet

The goal of this assignment is to create a visual presentation of the relationships in and issues raised by the play. *Directions:* Each group is responsible for one of the topics listed below. For the topic your group chooses, be prepared to do the following:

- Respond to the following questions and be prepared to explain your views to the class.
- Find and copy at least one and preferably more significant quotations to illustrate the issue, and draw a schematic diagram to show the relationships and their motivating force(s).

1. Love vs. Desire

Which characters truly love; which feel desire? Describe the relationships.

Is love better than desire (or vice versa), and if so, why?

Is there a place for both in a relationship? In this play, which emotion takes precedence?

2. Dependence vs. Independence

Which characters are dependent? Are they dependent on other people or on something else (an idea, a substance, an internal need)?

Is dependence an integral part of a relationship?

Can there be "healthy" and "unhealthy" dependence? Who exhibits each kind of dependence?

Which characters are independent and in what ways?

3. Cruelty

What kinds of cruelty occur in this play?

How are these cruelties related to love and desire, dependence and independence?

Can cruelty be confused with being helpful or loyal to someone? Who should decide whether behavior is cruel or not?

4. Illusions/ Dreams

What is the difference between illusions and dreams?

Who has illusions and what are they? Who has dreams and what are they?

How do these illusions or dreams affect the person who has them? How do they affect others?

What does the play say about the need for and reliance on illusions and/or dreams?

5. Responsibility to Others

Should a person be responsible *first* to a spouse, a sibling, or a friend? Why?

Show which relationship each character considers the most important.

How far should a person go in fulfilling this responsibility? (Is it permissible to hurt someone else in order to fulfill this responsibility?)

6. Responsibility to Oneself

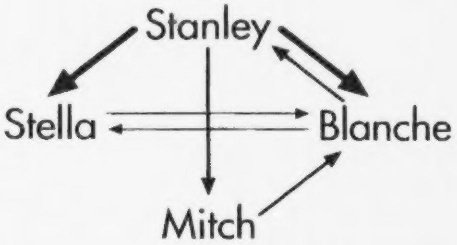
Is being responsible to oneself a selfish act? Why?

Is it possible to fulfill one's own needs without hurting others? Which characters, if any, show this in the play?

Were any of the characters' actions selfish? Which actions and why?

CRUELTY

"Deliberate cruelty is the one unforgivable thing."



Physical: "Oh, you want some rough-house! All right, let's have some rough-house!"

Mental: "So I been told and told and told and told! You know she's been feeding us a pack of lies."

Verbal: "He acts like an animal . . . there's even something subhuman. . . ."

Emotional: "Stell-aaahhhh!"

When the groups are ready to present their work, each group displays their poster for the class and reads aloud the relevant quotation(s) and their responses to the questions on the handout. The class can ask for clarification or mention other examples of this issue.

When we hang the finished posters around the room, we have a succinct review of the characters' problems and interactions, the play's dynamics, and the ultimate tragedy.

The inspiration for this strategy comes from the 4MAT technique developed by Bernice McCarthy. (This teaching technique incorporates activities for different learning styles and for both right-brain and left-brain processing. For further information on 4MAT, visit www.excelcorp.com.)

Leslie Oster, Teaneck High School, Teaneck, New Jersey

NOTES

The information on joining the NCTE Assembly on Media Arts in the April CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS included an incorrect e-mail address. For information on the Assembly, you may e-mail Alan Teasley at teaslea@dpsnc.net or contact him at 1213 Carroll St., Durham, NC 27707-1311; 915-560-2029.

TEACHER TALK

World Poetry Anthologies

Can anyone recommend anthologies of (translated) poetry from various cultures, that might be suitable for high school readers? I would also like to find more web sites with various types of poetry.

I am currently putting together a poetry course for high school students that will be up on the Internet through the Utah Education Network. Go to: http://www.uen.org/toolkit/. Click on courses, then scroll through the list until you come to Poetry: English: Intro to Poetry and highlight that. Then you can look at the syllabus (which is really the online content), the assignments, and a few quizzes.

Ellen Walker
emnwalker@yahoo.com

There is a good anthology of world poetry edited by Naomi Shihab Nye called *THIS SAME SKY: A COLLECTION OF POEMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD*. It is marketed as children's poetry, but many of the poems are sophisticated enough for secondary students and adults.

Another anthology intended for an adult audience and suitable for teens is edited by Mark Strand and Charles Simic and titled *ANOTHER REPUBLIC: 17 EUROPEAN AND SOUTH AMERICAN WRITERS*.

Lind Williams
LindW@provo.k12.ut.us

An excellent anthology is *A BOOK OF LUMINOUS THINGS* edited by Czezlaw Milosz. Most of the poems are fairly short, but come from all over the world.

Another book that I found extremely helpful supplying models for scholars to see different forms of poetry is *THE MAKING OF A POEM: A NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF POETIC FORMS*, edited by Mark Strand & Evan Boland.

Tim Mooney
mdshrk1@yahoo.com

FOCUS ON WRITING

Thirteen Ways of Looking at an Onyx Bird

The things we keep, the things we discard—all say something about the people we are. I have a collection of miscellaneous objects I have picked up at garage sales. I use them in the following activities to encourage writers to create the story/history of an inexpensive artifact and to develop imaginative connections between similar or unlike items.

I have used these activities with very good results with students ranging from middle school to twelfth grade, as well as with adult learners, whom I worked with as part of the Nebraska Writing Project.

Rationales and Objectives

Most of us have played a variation of the game "If you could rescue only one thing from a burning building, what would it be?" Though everyone supposedly knows that things are replaceable, that the intangibles of life are more significant than the material objects we surround ourselves with, we also know that some objects are very dear and others are disposable. How do we decide which is which?

Archaelogists would look at each of our homes as a field site, taking great care to describe and catalog each item. From their observations they would attempt to analyze the habits, values, and behaviors of the site's occupants. Writers can do the same. We often think of field sites as those places halfway around the world—the far-off island or the buried ruins of an ancient civilization. Or that culture is something that "other people" have. Yet cultural analysis can occur much closer to home, even in our own homes. Interesting things can happen when we begin looking at "stuff" as artifacts.

A second rationale involves the learning processes involved in describing, speculating, and connecting. Students may resist their teachers' invitation to look beneath the surface of a print or non-print text. They may be adept memorizers, but struggle to apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate knowledge. The activities listed below require that the writer enter into an imaginative engagement with the artifact, going beyond "It's just a __________. What can I say about it?" to an appreciation of the possibilities inherent in everything that surrounds us, even a 25-cent garage sale figurine.

Materials Needed

For these activities, you'll need to assemble enough artifacts to provide one per student. I assemble a bag of treasures from garage sales (and spend no more than 25 cents per item) rather than from my own home. This ensures that my responses to students' stories will not be influenced by my own knowledge of an item's history.

Introducing the Activities

I show the class a figurine of an onyx bird and tell them that it is from my home. I pass it around and encourage students to note any features they find interesting. They may also ask questions about the bird. When someone asks, "Where did you get it?" I respond that I bought the bird for fifty cents at a garage sale. Then I ask each student to remove an item from the large bag on my desk, holding the bag so that students cannot see the item they take out. Students may then choose one or more writing activities from the suggestions below.

Individual Activities

1. Consider the item you are holding. How much do you think it originally cost? Who bought or made the item? What might it represent to its creator and/or buyer? Consider how you can bring in the various elements of short fiction and write a short story based on this item.

2. Consider the item you are holding. Write an account of how it ended up on a garage sale. Was there a conflict involved? A happy event? A tragedy? Consider how you can bring in the various elements of short fiction and write a short story based on this item.

3. You hear a knock at the door at 2:00 a.m. As you stagger from your bed, you see the flashing red lights of a police car. An officer, search warrant in hand, demands that you turn over the item in front of you. Why does he/she want it? Explain in writing.

4. You have e-mail. It's from the richest woman in the world. She has learned that you are the current owner of the item in front of you. She offers you $5.2 million for it and will even come to your home personally to pick it up. Why does she want it? Explain in writing.

5. Your worst nightmare is coming true and your home is burning. You had time to save only one object, and that is the item in front of you. Your friends and family surround you, crying, "You saved THAT? Why?" Explain in writing.

6. You have just arrived in this community from a far-off island or the forgotten ruins of an ancient civilization. "Take me to your leader," you ask the first person you see. That person takes you to the Grand Poobah, who solemnly hands you the item you have in front of you. You understand it to be a welcoming gift, but you have no idea what the item is, what it is used for, or even which end is up. Make a list of all the uses one could make of your item.

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7. You have just moved to the tiny village of ___________. On one of your excursions to the city, you buy the item at a garage sale. When you return to the village and show your find to your new neighbors, they run screaming in terror from your home, shouting, "Get rid of it! Get it out of here! Do you know what you've done?" What are they afraid of? Explain in writing.

8. Create an advertising campaign for your item. Make it appear absolutely irresistible and price it accordingly. Which media will you use? Create a print, television, or radio advertisement and decide where and to whom you will market the item.

Small-Group Activities

9. Find someone whose item seems somehow connected to yours. Imagine that while everyone (except you) is asleep, the two items reminisce over their earlier life together and recall their eventual separation. Write the dialogue you overhear.

10. Find someone whose item seems to bear no connection whatsoever to yours. Brainstorm ways in which you might combine features of each to form a new creation. Describe in detail the steps you took and the purposes the new item might serve.

11. Find three other people to work with. Imagine that all your artifacts will be taking a sea voyage—on the Titanic. There is room for only one in the lifeboat. Each item (or its owner) must make its case for the item's survival while the other three pose counterarguments. Write their dialogue in the form of a script.

Large-Group Activities—Writing Future History

12. After twelve years of painstaking labor, you and your fellow archaeologists have unearthed the artifacts assembled in this room. Now you must describe this community's culture. Fortunately, you can speak the language of this species, but you do not know what the inhabitants looked like. Based upon the collection of items before you, what can you infer about the natives' values, occupations, daily routines, and physical appearance?

13. It is the year 3535. A group of archaeologists has donated its collection of artifacts to your community's museum. You and the other members of the museum committee have decided to name the exhibit "Yesterday in ________." Each one of you is assigned to research one artifact from the collection. Write the card/label that will appear with the item you were assigned.

These activities can serve as productive lead-in to units on local history or to any project that requires creative thinking or asks students to look at the familiar in unfamiliar ways or from different perspectives.

One of my classes decided to collaborate on the last suggestion and created its own museum, writing detailed and imaginative descriptions of items ranging from an unopened package of pink plastic doilies to a lone pepper shaker.

At the close of the activity, I allow students to keep the item they wrote about, if they wish. I also invite students to replenish my supply by contributing their own finds. Inspiration for writing comes from many sources, but in the case of the onyx bird, we have learned that one person's junk can be a writer's treasure.

Martha Kruse, University of Nebraska at Kearney, Nebraska

PREVIEW

The Puritans Have Nothing to Do with My Life

This excerpt is taken from Chapter 6 of *MAKING AMERICAN LITERATURES IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE*, edited by Anne Ruggles Gere (NCTE, 2001).

"Please trust me. There are some really interesting things we'll study as the semester goes on. We just have to get through this time period first." I was trying to explain. Rather than issuing a detention, I had chosen to engage in a discussion with the student whose dissonance had become a behavior problem in my classroom. While he and I sat in conference in the computer lab across the hall, his classmates, the other twenty-nine juniors and seniors back in the classroom, were supposed to read about Jonathan Edwards. In reality, they were probably speculating about our conversation. I lamented; I just hoped there was *some* learning going on somewhere.

"No." He shook his head in one decisive and forceful nod. "The Puritans have nothing to do with my life."

To Sean, that was the end of the discussion. No explanation from me would convince this seventeen-year-old African American growing up in the 1990s in Southfield, Michigan, that there was any need to study those who landed on Plymouth Rock nearly three hundred years before. Sean's world didn't include patience with a teacher who begged for his trust. He was growing up in a middle-class environment with nice parents who were college educated and professionals in their fields. His parents provided all the modern comforts a teen could desire—clothes, vacations, computers, and so on. But more than that, I think ▶

they instilled in their son a desire to really use his brain. He was an "A" student and a good writer. But Sean didn't passively accept what was put before him; he had to shape new learning into his own worldview. And the Puritans didn't fit. I admired the way his refusal to participate was a part of his character. He reminded me a little bit of myself; I was always one for a good protest. His statement pounded in my head again. "The Puritans have nothing to do with my life."

As I sighed, I couldn't help but wonder about his argument. What *did* the Puritans have to do with his life?

Until I met Sean, I taught American literature chronologically. I started with the Puritans and continued on through time until the semester ended. This maybe got the class to the 1950s if we hurried through the 1800s. It's the way I was taught, and it was the only way I knew. I never considered anything else. But then I had to remind myself of a time when I was the student challenging the status quo. *The Catcher in the Rye* had been banned from the high school classrooms in the small town where I grew up, but I defiantly read the novel and confidently quoted from it in a speech to the school and the community. Just because that's the way it's been done before doesn't mean it's the best way. It may be the *easiest* way, but Sean forced me to ask another question: *For whom* was it easy?

Kara Kuuttila Shuell, Southfield High School, Southfield, Michigan

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TEACHER TALK

Teaching "A Rose for Emily"

I have never taught "A Rose for Emily" before but am looking forward to doing so in a short while. I was wondering if anyone teaches this story and could share some activities they have used with it. Thanks.

Mary Kirkpatrick
mskp@tenet.edu

I teach this every year. The first activity is to try building a timeline. We also do foreshadowing—going back to examine the imagery and behaviors that might lead to such behavior. One of our discussion questions is, "Are we supposed to like or admire Emily?"

Here's a Web site with lots of links: http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/faulkner/out.html.

I read an interesting article about where Faulkner got the character. She was partly a real cousin of his and also, according to some critics, fashioned after the common notion of Emily Dickinson, since a 50th anniversary edition of her poetry had just been put out and interest had been revived in what critics of the time thought was her unusual life style. Faulkner was a fan of hers.

There are some other stories with similar characters, although this particular branch of the Griersons doesn't come back in any of the novels. I like to use "Dry September" with "A Rose for Emily" because of the repression in both dominant female characters.

Mary Filak
Shatzie2@aol.com

I taught it with the Anti-Transcendentalists. If you are using the yellow McDougall-Littell book, it is set up that way. Depending on other works, there is a lot to do with setting, foreshadowing, and point of view. (There is a mistake in the McDougall-Littell teacher's edition, however. One thing the students liked was trying to figure out, in the twisting narrative, how long she has been sleeping with the body. It is very important that they find an "iron-gray" hair. This tells you that she has been sleeping with the body at least somewhat recently. See the paragraph about her hair changing shades of grey. The McDougall-Littell teacher's edition does not take into account the shades of grey, and the teacher's note to the side is incorrectly worded.)

I taught "A Rose for Emily" for the first time this year. I created interest by telling my students, "There is a warning here in my book that says this story contains objectionable material." Then I sat back and let them read. I watched for the looks on their faces as they finished. That was the starting point of the discussion the next day.

Shane Marshall
shanem@wam.defnet.com

My students really enjoy working in pairs to make a timeline of the events, including the antecedent action. The story is not in chronological order (sort of post modern, I guess) and this is very confusing for them.

The timeline, starting with the earliest event mentioned, continuing in order through Miss Emily's death, the entering of her upstairs chamber by the men, and the hasty exit of

▶

the servant, helps them understand why she does what she does. It also helps them find clues to support their ideas. They should even try to put dates to each event by counting forward and backwards from the actual dates that are given (10 years after she cut her hair, etc.). It's hard, but fun.

Peggy Smith
Psmith@staff.chuh.org

I, too, have my students place the main events in chronological order as they read. In addition, I tell them ahead of time to be on the look-out for examples of decay and of prejudice (not just black/white, but male/female, old/new, etc.) throughout the story. I also ask them to speculate as to whether the narrator is male or female. After we've read and discussed, I show the film version (about 1/2 hour long) with Angelica Houston in the role of Emily.

This is one of my favorite stories, and the kids always love it.

Portia McJunkin
lamar170@aol.com

This is a strange but wonderful story. Kids kind of get into the grossness of it. I focus on all the "wonderful" imagery, the dust, decay, and death. And then one year when we read it, there was a story on the local (Milwaukee) news about the discovery of an old woman who'd been living with a corpse for a few years! It was incredible, but true. I think it's a hard story for some kids to read, but you could probably do a sequencing activity—what happens when. It's certainly not your average chronological story.

Also, for an art tie-in, Holt, Reinhart, Winston's *ELEMENTS OF LITERATURE* (junior year) features that fantastic painting of a large, gothic looking door. That painting is in the Art Institute of Chicago. It's a really large painting, and I've seen it several times, but I don't remember the name or the artist. There might be a writing prompt in that painting.

Dawn Hogue
dhogue@excel.net

The artist is Ivan Albright. All of his paintings are black and white with some little addition of red. There is an eerie grotesqueness to many of his works. (Yes, the Art Institute of Chicago has several of Albright's paintings; that's partially because he is from the Aurora, Illinois area.)

Katherine Steinbring
kstein@lphs.org

After discussing the chronology, Emily, and her relationships with the town, I would suggest talking about the title and Faulkner's choosing that particular title. Ask students what I consider a fascinating question: What is the rose for Emily? What IS the rose?

Bethany Spangelo
bethanys@metnet.state.mt.us

LETTERS

A Poetry Lesson That Teaches Trust

In response to "Do You Ask High School Students to Read Aloud?" ("Teacher Talk," August 2001), I must share a practice I have found successful at every grade level in the teaching of and strengthening of reading skills. Because my initial expertise has been in working with kids at risk, a class in which this activity always works, I began the lesson with high school students.

During the first class period of a year, I give each student one numbered line of a poem, being careful *not to mention* that the line comes from a poem. I point out challenging words, words already listed on a strip on the wall. The students will be asked to know the meanings of those words, not the spelling, on Friday's quiz.

Next, I ask if any students would like to hear me say their lines. In a typical situation, I say each line three or more times. I always thank the student for the opportunity to read the line. My pronunciation allows students not strong in English to hear the correct sounds. Recently an 8th-grade girl requested I repeat her line eight times. She said, "I need to explain why I am having you say the line so often. The sounds I need to say are not in my native language. I'm having to train my tongue to move a new way."

Now, each day, Monday through Thursday, we practice the poem. I have a chart created with the numbers and point to the numbers, asking the students to say the lines, always in order.

Fridays we say the lines, this time having memorized them.

Several profound actions are accomplished. First, students hear and learn to speak most of the lines simply by hearing them repeatedly during the week. Once in a summer class of non-reading students, we found that on Fridays the five 1st graders could always repeat the entire poem.

Second, shy students become more bold, and finally, the poem binds the class into a strong, beautiful unit.

My classes feel such power that they are courageous enough to present the poems to other classes and with other groups. I have even had classes present poems to the school board, the city council, and retirement homes.

Poetry teaches trust and power in the language.

Mitzi Merrill
Snohomish, Washington

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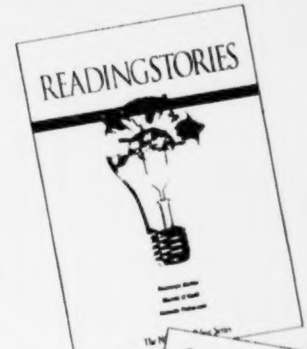

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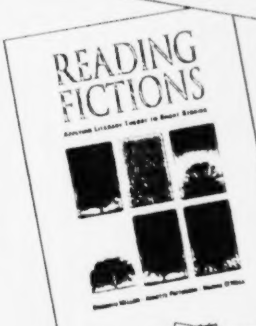

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Motivating Students To Do Their Own Research

A Case for Caribbean Literature

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I have never started a poem yet whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovering.

—Robert Frost

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You'll find additional new teaching ideas in the Web Extras box on the CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS Web site at www.ncte.org/notesplus.

IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Recently we've been hearing a good number of requests from teachers for poetry ideas, so in this issue of *Classroom Notes Plus* we've included "Introducing Reluctant Poets to Poetry" and "Using a Memory Web Chart to Write Poetry." We're also adding poetry resources to the Poetry Page on the new *Classroom Notes Plus* Web site (www.ncte.org/notesplus).

In this issue you'll also find two creative ways to use photographs in the classroom, plus ideas for teaching satire, making research papers more manageable for your students, and showing support for student teachers. The "Focus on Writing" column features a writing assignment based on Aesop's fables, and includes a handout page for use with the pre-writing exercise.

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Introducing Reluctant Poets to Poetry

When I introduce my poetry unit, I usually encounter a classroom of reluctant poets. A few students love poetry and look forward to the unit, but many cringe as soon as I mention the word "poetry."

I always begin my unit by asking, "What is a poem?" Several standard answers usually surface: poetry is about love, death, or nature, and poems contain both rhyme and complex symbolism. Throughout the unit, my goal is to shatter these preconceived notions and demonstrate that poetry can be about any topic written in any style the poet chooses.

After asking students to define poetry, I pass out several examples of nontraditional poems. My favorites to use for this lesson are: "This Is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams and "On the Inclusion of Miniature Dinosaurs in Breakfast Cereal Boxes" by John Updike. These poems are simple to understand, and they are accessible enough to appeal to the most hesitant poetry student.

Once we have read several poems of this type, I discuss the techniques used in poetry. Since I teach high school, most of the students have learned these terms and can define techniques such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, personification, and rhyme. We establish definitions, then I have the students find examples of these techniques in the sample poems.

My next goal is to help students become poets. In preparation, I have cut out many ordinary pictures from old magazines—a coat hanger, a tomato, a car tire, and so on.

I pass out these pictures to my students, and each student is responsible for writing a short poem about the object in the picture. The poem only needs to be four lines long, but two of the poetic techniques must be present within the poem. The poem can describe the object, explain how the object is used, or be a personal reaction to the object. I present this sample:

Toothbrush

Rub-a-dub-dub
I make your teeth clean
Like a fresh sheet of paper
Until a blueberry dares to stain my work

I ask students to help me list the poetic techniques used in this short poem. We note that it uses imagery, onomatopoeia, and simile.

Next it is students' turn to write a poem. At first, some students may seem frustrated, and I occasionally face a question like, "How do I write a poem about a fried chicken drumstick?" I keep a few extra pictures on hand and let students trade if they feel their object is too challenging.

At the end of this lesson, I ask students to show their pictures and read their poems aloud. The entire class gets absorbed in this activity, and we laugh at the silly poems that emerge about objects such as cucumbers and forks.

By the time the students leave the classroom, they have realized two things: a poem can be written in any form about any topic, and they are all poets.

Kristen M. Burgess, St. Mary's High School, Lancaster, New York

Snapshot Connections

In one of my favorite children's books, *I Love Old Things*, by Harold Darling, the narrator confesses, "I love old shops, ones with crowded windows and overflowing shelves, places where the endless quest can be pursued, the unknown discovered, and rewards achieved." I share this sentiment. Antique stores hold memories, stories, mementos, treasures of the heart and mind. Recently in an antique store I saw an intriguing assortment of old photographs and wondered what I could do with them. Each snapshot made me curious; each one made me wonder.

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This led to a teaching idea which I intend to implement this year: *snapshot connections*. I plan to purchase about thirty interesting old photographs taken during the 1930s and 1940s—pictures of people, places, and objects. My goal is to use the photographs during my introduction to a unit on the novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This novel's events occur during the Great Depression, a time unfamiliar to most of my students.

I will begin by sharing the poetry collection *Something Permanent* by Cynthia Rylant, inspired by photographs taken by Walker Evans during the Depression. Each photograph in the book is accompanied by a Rylant poem, telling a story suggested by the snapshot.

After this introduction, students will each select one of my purchased "antique" photographs. Their assignment will be to write the story suggested to them by the snapshot. They will be allowed to tell the story in a variety of ways: poetry, short story, diary or journal entry, letter, newspaper article, play—whatever format they decide will be most effective.

To help students get started, I will model a prewriting activity for them, using one of the old photographs or one of Walker Evans's photographs. On the overhead projector or chalkboard, I'll write the following five sentence stubs:

I wonder . . .

This reminds me of . . .

This picture makes me feel . . .

The one word that comes to mind when I see this photo is . . .

Next . . .

I'll ask the class to brainstorm words and phrases to consider the photograph and complete the sentence stubs.

Then I'll ask students to use this same prewriting strategy to get started writing about their own old photograph. The emotions and personal connections tied to these words and phrases will lead them into their storytelling.

After revision and editing, each student will make a photocopy of their photograph, prepare a final copy of their story, and mount both on black paper. All of the stories can then be posted on a classroom bulletin board, or bound together into a class photo album.

I expect my students to benefit from the prewriting and writing experience involved in this activity, and even though we don't know the names of the people and places preserved in these snapshots from the past, I believe my students will gain an appreciation for the power of images to inspire reflection and creativity.

Lea Ann Ponder, Hildebrandt Intermediate School, Spring, Texas

A Simple Thank You

In advice columns like "Dear Abby," I often see letters of complaint from people who have not received acknowledgment or thanks for birthday, holiday, and wedding gifts. And at school, I occasionally see an incident like this: a girl drops a book and another student picks it up and hands it to her. The girl takes the book but says nothing.

Has our society become so jaded that we don't take the time to thank people? Or are young adults not being taught common courtesy?

Author Alex Haley's motto was "Find the good and praise it," and he practiced what he preached. Before the Thanksgiving holiday, I assign my eighth-grade students to read an essay by Haley entitled "Thank You" (*Parade Magazine*, Nov. 21, 1982).

As Haley describes, during World War II, he was a cook in the Coast Guard. After preparing a Thanksgiving dinner at sea in 1943, he took a break on deck and thought about the holiday and giving thanks. People who had shaped his life and made him the person he was came to mind. He went to his quarters and wrote letters to these people to thank them for the life lessons they had given him. He thanked his grandmother for her wonderful cooking and discipline; he thanked his father for giving him the love of books and reading; and he thanked his former principal for being a good role model.

In the weeks that followed, Haley received letters from all three people. They thanked Haley for thanking *them*.

To encourage students to show appreciation, I use this essay as a springboard for a writing assignment.

First, as a class, we brainstorm a list of reasons to thank someone: for a gift, for doing something special like taking them along on a trip or driving them to and from the movies, for being a good friend or relative, or for helping them understand or learn something new.

Then I ask students to make a list of the people who have made a difference in their lives or done something special for them. Usually these people are friends, relatives, neighbors, coaches, and former teachers. Next to the person's name, students list specific things that person has done.

Then I review letter format with the class, and we discuss what should be included in their letters.

I suggest that thank-you notes should always be hand written to make them personal. I give some additional guidelines: Write as if the person were standing in front of you and be honest and sincere. Begin by telling the person why you are thanking him or her. Mention the gift or act and explain why it is special to you. If someone gave you money, you don't necessarily need to mention the amount, but do tell the giver how you plan to use the money. Thank the person once again before the closing.

▶

Students will need to research addresses for the recipients whose letters will be mailed; others will be hand delivered to family members and friends. Students may use stationery or cards, or may enjoy constructing homemade cards themselves.

Here are two Web sites that provide advice and examples for writing a note of thanks:

http://kidslangarts.about.com/library/weekly/aa092800a.htm?once+true&

http://www.allsands.com/Writing/writingthankyo_pp_gn.htm

Students enjoy sharing the responses they get from the recipients of their notes. They feel glad about having done something to make another person feel appreciated. This writing activity emphasizes a useful life skill that students need. I encourage them to follow Alex Haley's example to "find the good and praise it," and I try to model this maxim as well.

Deb Cates, Grisham Middle School, Austin, Texas

Satiric Town Meeting

My students sometimes have trouble grasping the concept of satire. The following activity provides a way to allow students an opportunity to develop their own satirical voice and consider the effectiveness of satire in solving today's social problems.

I adapted the idea of using a town meeting format, sometimes called a panel discussion, from *THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE: BRITISH LITERATURE*, published by McDougal Littell. A town meeting provides students with the opportunity to employ creative and divergent thinking skills to situations or problems that have no set answers.

I use this assignment after we've discussed the concept of satire and read Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." We discuss what a town meeting looks like, and then I ask students to brainstorm possible modern societal problems that would be brought up at a town meeting.

I once filled four blackboards with all of the social issues students found interesting, listing issues from teen pregnancy and cigarette smoking to public displays of affection and bad lunchroom food. However, this activity works best when the town meeting consists of four to six social issues with four or five students per topic.

Students self-group by choosing the topic each finds interesting. Each participant in the group must offer a different solution to the same problem, and the solution must be satiric in nature. Individual solutions must contain satirical characteristics: playful or bitter humor, criticism of a large group or institution, irony, or naive narrator.

Students research their topics and solutions at the library and on the Internet. Then they get back into their small groups and bounce their ideas and solutions off of each other; this provides an excellent opportunity for peer feedback.

Collaboration is essential with this activity, not only so the students confirm that they each have a different solution to the same problem, but also as a means to identify and understand verbal irony and to appreciate a satirist's use of words and phrases for their shock value.

The proof that this activity engages students came from a normally aloof, disinterested male student; he created the most creative solution to the problem of underage drinking I have heard so far. His solution was to develop fluorescent green additives which react with an individual's body chemistry when the person has reached a .08 percent blood alcohol level and to place them into commercially manufactured alcohol products. When a person becomes drunk, they begin to glow green, consequently parents, school officials, and police can see when a teen (or adult) has been drinking. This student also researched the possible chemicals that could be used, the ways in which manufacturers could afford to use the additive, and the implementation of the program.

After students research and prepare their presentations, we hold the town meetings. Each panel takes a turn presenting its solutions and follows the social and political etiquette of a real town meeting. One person at a time speaks without being interrupted. To accomplish this, the students bring paper and pencil with them to the town meeting, so they can take notes instead of barging in on their peers' presentations. The audience—students pretending to be the town residents—also takes notes and does not interrupt the presenters.

Students receive points toward their grade for responding to another presenter's ideas as well as for thoroughly presenting their own ideas; this encourages "thinking on your feet."

In spite of the prior planning and collaboration in which the students participate, occasions for fresh revelations always occur during the actual town meetings. Once the panel itself has had the opportunity to make its presentation, the meeting is opened up to questions from the town residents.

Student assessment can be based on use of satiric techniques; presentation skills, including use of verbal irony, voice, and tone; critical thinking; decisionmaking and problem solving skills; and research skills (to access, interpret, and apply information from a variety of print and non-print sources).

As a result of the mix of class discussions, small groups,

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Thematic Literature Units

I just finished teaching American and British literature to 11th and 12th graders this past year. Since it was my first year, I followed the chronological structure used by the textbooks, but at the very least, I am extremly unmotivated by this structure. I would really like to build units around thematic topics but am baffled as to where to begin. Could anyone provide some insight about building thematic units?

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You might check out some of the areas on the Crossroads Web site (a project of the American Studies Association) for ideas.

http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads.html

There are some sample American Studies programs that are built around themes, and the American Studies Web link leads to a subject-oriented index of web resources. I have taught American Literature for three years and found the themed approach worked so much better than the chronological.

One approach I used was to do a two-week overview of the "history" of American Literature, focusing on the literary periods—types of literature, themes, background, social/political/cultural connections.

This allowed me to cover the literary periods without making that the focus of the course. We read and covered the introductions to the periods, listed the authors, and looked at a few examples of the work. We were then free to go off in a more thematic direction for the rest of the year. Since we were trying to coordinate with history, there was still a chronological connection but it was much more flexible.

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independent study, and group presentations, students can also be assessed informally at many levels, and the teacher can frequently check for understanding. Culmination of the activity relies on finally answering the question, What are the pros and cons of using satirical humor to help solve problems?

Every student is engaged during this activity, from brainstorming to planning and presenting to observing. Inevitably, at the end of the semester when I ask the students to evaluate my teaching and what they have studied, the town meeting is most often listed as the activity they enjoyed the most and remembered the most. A teacher can't beat a testimonial like that!

Arlen H. Kimmelman, Cumberland Regional High School, Seabrook, New Jersey

Motivating Students to Do Their Own Research

I noticed late one evening that in order to grade my stack of student research papers—all sixty of them—I couldn't settle down without cleaning the house first and then pouring a rather large glass of cold Chablis. This worried me.

If this was the way I was feeling about that stack of research papers, I wondered how my students regarded the Herculean task of combing materials, taking notes, organizing, drafting, revising, and spinning such a process into a finished product.

Actually, if my students had walked through such a process every time, I would have been elated. Yet, I realized that my students too often related to research papers as consumers who spit back what has been digested by others. Often this spitting back of information encouraged plagiarism and discouraged critical thinking. Sound familiar?

So I started my own investigations. I went straight to the library and found journal articles that addressed strategies to motivate students to do their own research. Armed with a few strategies and a desire to experiment, I began to implement controlled research projects—a theme that came up often in the resources I read.

By controlled, I mean that the papers are controlled by time, length, purpose, and in some cases, materials. Each research project emphasizes all the sequential processes of good research but is compacted into smaller papers that become progressively more difficult once the basics have been covered. These "micro themes" work better with my students than the larger end-of-the-semester projects. And shorter papers means more practice.

I use controlled research projects in Freshman Composition courses at the college level, but middle school and

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high school English classes could use or adapt many of the same ideas I've found effective. Here are a few samples to start the wheels turning.

1. Day of Birth—For students who need to gain confidence in their research skills, start them out on a project that relies on an easy-to-use source such as *THE NEW YORK TIMES*.

Ask students to research the date and year they were born, and then to report on a 5" x 8" index card the local, national, and international news of the day.

This beginning research activity becomes a stepping stone for more complex assignments.

2. Case Folder Approach—Several of my colleagues have found much success by giving students different folders filled with articles on controversial topics.

One such example, "The Bernie Goetz Case," gave students the experience of reading related articles on the 1984 incident and on gun control and writing a persuasive piece in which they must defend or dispute Goetz for his vigilante actions.

3. The Movie Review —Students watch and critique a movie of their choice. They then find three critics who have published reviews on the selected movie in popular newspapers or magazines. On a 5" x 7" index card, students are asked to compose their review of the movie—intertwined with the views of three published critics.

Economy of words is emphasized as well as use of direct quotes, paraphrases, and endnotes. Along with the final index card, photocopies of the articles from critics must be passed in as well.

4. Persuasive Letter Writing—Students investigate a local or national concern that interests them by reading a wide variety of accounts in local or national newspapers and magazines.

After collecting information on a topic, students must take a stand by writing a persuasive letter to a public official to ask for some action to be taken.

Students share in the excitement when their voices are heard and letters answered.

5. Researching Old Murders—IN *MURDER, MISCHIEF, AND MAYHEM* (NCTE, 1978), W. Keith Kraus reports that he has been assigning old murders from *The New York Times* to students in place of assigning the traditional term paper. Students must gather, organize, and reference materials to solve these unsolved mysteries.

Kraus reports that motivation is high and plagiarism is low.

6. Oral Histories—Part of research can be investigating the stories that are found through interviews.

One of my favorite assignments involves asking students to interview the eldest member of their family to discuss family heritage, customs, or historic events. Students then write up their findings in a formal paper. Of the numerous papers I have received in the past, this activity always has engaged total commitment from my students.

This assignment needs to be handled sensitively, and an alternate option needs to be available for students whose family situation precludes the original assignment.

7. Action Research Papers—An exciting addition to research is for students to investigate a problem, gather data, draw conclusions, and present findings in a formal paper. Besides using library sources, students can learn much from this triangulation of primary and secondary sources.

For example, students could investigate how members in their community feel about a perceived problem, or students could create a feasibility study to address a perceived need, such as a need for a place for teens to go after school. It's an important part of this project for students to choose their own interests.

8. I-Search—In *THE I-SEARCH PAPER* (Heinemann, 1986), Ken Macrorie reports that he has had great success in giving students freedom to choose any topic or questions they want to investigate.

Time, length, shape, and purpose on these projects may take any form; however, primary and secondary sources create more comprehensive papers.

As instructors, we need to continue to search for better strategies for involving students in research projects.

I found that controlled papers mean more practice, more research, more interest, and more success. They also mean less plagiarism, less anxiety, and fewer headaches for me as well as my students. An added bonus is that shorter papers require students to practice more with the conventions of research and with word economy. When students are forced to edit carefully, their writing becomes stronger, tighter, and more energetic.

In most of these assignments, I still require note cards, citations, and manuscript form, but I have come to appreciate with my students that research does not have to be boring. I find that I can look forward to my students research papers without first cleaning my house. That is a very good sign.

Katherine P. McFarland, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania

"Finders" Teach Vocabulary

I loved the idea that Gloria Pipkin shared with me a few years ago. She requires the students to do "Finders." These are their own vocabulary words that they find in their own lives. Words come from reading, TV, other teachers, conversations, etc.

I give students a sheet where they write the finder in the context where they found it, guess at its meaning, go to the dictionary, write down the definition, and then use it in their own sentence. They find five words a week, which is easy to do. I collect them every two weeks and give a quiz over five of the students' finders.

To make sure students get the vocabulary that I think they should know, like words that relate to a text we are studying, I give them a word of the day. I give the students bonus points if they use the word in a conversation that day. At the end of the term I give a fun quiz over the words-of-the-day. Sometimes it is a crossword puzzle, or I might have students get into groups and retell a fairy tale using as many words-of-the-day correctly as they can. It is a contest with candy bars or other small gifts as prizes.

These two strategies have worked well for me for two years and the students like them!

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Thirteen Tips for Supporting Student Teachers

I can still remember the moment eleven years ago when I first walked into the classroom where I would spend six months as a student teacher. My stomach was full of butterflies and my hands trembled with fear. My cooperating teacher had thirty years of teaching experience and arrived at school by 6:00 a.m. each day, remarkably organized. Terrified of saying or doing anything wrong, I sat quietly day after day, absorbing everything my mentor had to offer.

Student teaching can be a positive or negative experience for newcomers to the teaching profession. As cooperating teachers or faculty members, we can make a big difference. Now that I have had the opportunity to nurture student teachers in my own classroom, I have come up with some tips for making the student teaching experience a positive and productive one.

1. *Create a professional environment for student teachers.* Find your student teacher a full-size teacher desk if at all possible. It's hard for a student teacher to feel like a professional while perched in a small student desk in the corner of the room.

2. *Give student teachers "space" within your classroom.* Student teachers should have space to put up bulletin or memo boards of their own. In addition, consider clearing out a couple of drawers in your filing cabinet, or set aside closet space for them to store their materials.

3. *Share all aspects of teaching with your student teachers.* As teachers we know that the teaching experience actually includes a wide variety of activities. Invite student teachers to attend meetings with other staff members, parent conferences, and after-school functions.

4. *Acquire supplies such as tape dispensers, three-hole punches, or staplers for student teachers, so that they don't have to borrow from you on a regular basis.* Helping a student teacher feel self-sufficient in this small way will help increase his or her confidence.

5. *Give student teachers a choice among the required content, when deciding what they will be required to teach.* Given some choice, student teachers will be more likely to generate a creative unit which will pique student interest.

6. *Give student teachers independence within your classroom.* Allow student teachers to be alone with the class as much as possible. However, be careful not to have the "sink or swim" mentality. Giving student teachers independence is not the same as leaving them to fend for themselves.

7. *Allow student teachers to experiment with new ideas.* Student teachers can be creative and inventive when they know they have the support of an experienced teacher as a safety net.

8. *Encourage student teachers to visit other classrooms.* Each teacher in your building has something unique to offer a new teacher. Allowing student teachers to visit other classrooms broadens their experience.

9. *Introduce student teachers to your class as colleagues rather than students.* This places student teachers on equal ground with you and gives student teachers instant authority in the classroom.

10. *Let student teachers be "in charge" while they are teaching.* If a discipline problem arises while a student teacher is in control of your class, let her attempt to handle it on her own. Jumping in to discipline a student while a student teacher is teaching undermines her authority. Wait until your help is requested by the student teacher before giving it. This may be difficult to do, but it is very important in help-

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ing the student teacher experiment with discipline procedures in the classroom.

11. *Model good faculty relations. Avoid gossiping or bad-mouthing other teachers.* We are role models for student teachers and should exhibit professionalism at all times. Try to stay positive at all times, even if there are others around you who do not.

12. *Introduce student teachers to the faculty and encourage other co-workers to make them feel welcome in their new environment.* Nothing can be more intimidating than walking around all day feeling like an outsider because you don't see any familiar faces in the school building.

13. *Practice acts of kindness toward student teachers. A little note of encouragement can go a long way when the stress level of student teaching is high.* Other ideas include: occasionally bringing a student teacher a cup of coffee; leaving a surprise gift such as a notepad or pen on his or her desk; or asking students to write the student teacher an encouraging card. The possibilities are endless, the cost is small, but the rewards are priceless to student teachers.

The next time you see a student teacher in your building, extend a smile and recall what it was like when you walked in those same shoes. Whether you are a cooperating teacher or another faculty member, remember that your encouragement and respect are vital to the growth of these apprentices in the teaching profession.

Heather Temple, Hastings Ninth Grade Center, Houston, Texas

Using a Memory Web Chart to Write Poetry

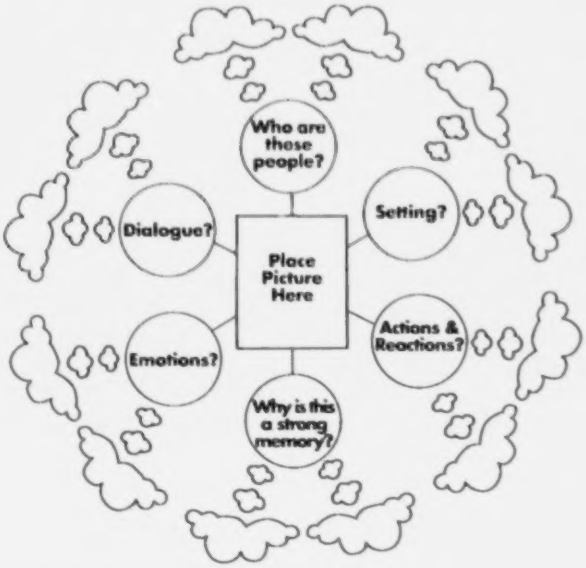
"Poems are memories," I tell my students. "Beautiful, fun, sad, unforgettable remnants of time etched so deeply within the poet that they can never be erased. Sometimes poets travel so far from home, they detach themselves so completely from their childhood that dust settles over the memories, and they forget they are there."

"I don't know what to write about," students say when they start writing poetry. That's when I use memories as a springboard for writing. I tell them to do a little housecleaning and look carefully under the dust.

I ask students to bring in photographs from their lives—snapshots of people, places, and activities that evoke memories for them.

We look at the photographs in class, talk about the actions and reactions within these pictures, the voices we cannot hear, the emotions we cannot read. The pictures open up conversations of similar experiences and of the memories and emotions the pictures evoke.

Next I explain that we will be creating memory webs as a prewriting activity for poetry. I display a transparency of the Memory Web Chart shown below.



I show students that the photograph goes in the center and that the inner circles are to help prompt them to remember certain information about the pictures. The inner circles are labeled: Who are these people?, Dialogue, Actions/reactions, Setting, and Why is this a strong memory? The clouds are for writing down the details they remember.

"A poem is like a stained glass window," I say. I hold up a stained glass picture of a hummingbird that hangs in my kitchen window all year. "The writer holds memories up to the light. Readers examine them from every angle and try to decide what it was the poet found so enthralling."

While the students examine the detail in the hummingbird, I explain that memories are unique. When I write a memory as a poem, I try to make it just as clear and beautifully crafted as the picture I hold up.

The next day, students use their own memories and the Memory Web Chart as a guide to write their own poems.

Students first collect construction paper and art supplies and then disperse into writing groups. In their groups, they explore the memories evoked by their pictures. Students

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select one picture each to use with the memory web and fill in the clouds with the details they remember. When they feel they have enough details, they use the completed Memory Web to write a poem about that memory.

Poems may be short or long, happy or sad, formatted in any way the students wish. The important thing is for the students to focus on their memory and try to create a poem that vividly recreates what was important to them about that memory. When students feel their poems are finished, they are invited to share them with the class.

We have a follow-up lesson on simile and metaphor, and students return to their poems to use similes and metaphors to add clarity and texture to their writing. After this, students may again share with the class. It can be interesting in this step to compare the two versions of the poem and see what a difference the similes and metaphors made.

Using memories is an effective springboard for teaching poetry; it eases students into a comfort zone and validates their thoughts.

Guadalupe G. McCall, Christa McAuliffe Junior High School, San Antonio, Texas

A Case for Caribbean Literature in the English Curriculum

Teachers of English rarely debate the value of a multicultural education nowadays, yet it seems that few provide a truly multicultural curriculum for their students. It's possible that some teachers fail to see the value of a multicultural curriculum, feel they lack sufficient training or mentoring, have little access to materials, or believe that teaching such a curriculum would burden them with additional work.

Of all the concerns mentioned, lack of access to materials can most easily be addressed, and the teacher of English is uniquely placed to provide a lead for her colleagues.

Literature written in English, but representing a variety of cultural perspectives, is being published all over the world and is an excellent source of materials. Among these texts, Caribbean literature is a much neglected resource for the multicultural classroom.

Exploring multicultural literature can broaden and enrich all students' experience, and is particularly relevant in locales where students from diverse backgrounds are found, such as South Florida, where I teach.

Compelling reasons for teaching literature from other cultures are outlined by Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs in *Literature: An Introductions to Reading and Writing (Prentice Hall, 1998)*

> Literature helps us grow, both personally and intellectually. . . . It links us with the cultural, philosophic, and religious world of which we are part. It enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times we otherwise would never know existed. . . . Through our cumulative experience in reading, literature shapes our goals and values by clarifying our own identities. . . . It enables us to develop perspectives on events occurring locally and globally, and thereby it gives us understanding and control. It is one of the shaping influences of life. It makes us human. (1–2)

A word of caution in teaching literature from other cultures, however. We must be sure not only to choose texts carefully for content but we must teach ourselves and our students to read critically, to avoid stereotyping and perpetuating misconceptions about cultures with which we are unfamiliar.

In *Windows: Exploring Personal Values through Reading and Writing* (HarperCollins, 1993), Jeff Rackham and Olivia Bertagnolli contend that "the particular culture we live in shapes our values and our lives through inherent traditions and myths. But simultaneously our cultural background may limit our understanding of other cultural traditions and myths." (94–95)

One of the enduring myths about the Caribbean, for example, is that its peoples are happy-go-lucky and eager to please. This myth doubtless came about because the U.S. population is exposed to the region primarily as a potential playground. Consequently, tourist images persist while the real lives and concerns of Caribbean peoples remain unlearned and ignored.

Teachers who would like to find good Caribbean texts and other resource material for their classrooms should first contact their school media specialist. In many instances, the media specialist has materials on hand or will be able to suggest materials and help the teacher access them. Caribbean teachers on the faculty can be an excellent resource.

In addition, the resources named here (and provided on the *Classroom Notes Plus* Web site at www.ncte.org/notesplus) were compiled to supplement other available resources.

Useful Websites for Learning about Caribbean Literature

A List of Selected Caribbean Authors and Titles for Use in High School

As with any new effort, introducing Caribbean literature into the classroom demands a commitment of time on the

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part of the teacher, but the benefits for both student and teacher are clear.

As a tool for teaching tolerance in an increasingly diverse society, literature from other cultures is invaluable. In addition, Caribbean literature exposes students not only to a variety of cultural perspectives, but also to the familiar genres, themes, and literary devices found in all good literature.

Paula Edwards, Stoneman-Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida

Creating Community through Photography and Student Work

Principals talk about it. Teachers talk about it. When it exists, even students talk about it. Educators have long talked about the importance of building community, but have they clearly communicated what they are looking for? I begin work at the beginning of the year to create, not just any community, but a community of *learners*.

For students to take ownership of the classroom, student work must be displayed. Too often, however, the teacher determines which work is displayed. The teacher posts the work of a few select students, or the teacher posts work the student doesn't want to share with the community. To create a community of learners and introduce students to the concept of publication, students must determine which work is displayed.

During the first week of class, I walk around the classroom taking photographs of each student reading and each student writing. At the beginning of the second week, I give students their two photographs and a piece of 18" x 12" construction paper.

Each student glues the two photographs on the left side of the construction paper, leaving enough space for a piece of writing on the right side. This piece of construction paper, I explain, will be an ongoing exhibit of their learning.

Students staple their exhibits to the back wall, creating a "quilt" of their work and photographs. Then the students staple (not glue) pieces of work to their exhibits. Throughout the year, they will be asked to "publish" current work in this space. They may choose which work they publish, but they must publish different work each grading period. Although written work dominates the student exhibits, students will occasionally display their artwork as well.

Although the space for publishing student work is important, the students' photographs are equally important for several reasons. As a child, I remember visiting my grandparents' house and staring at the table of framed family photographs. I knew some of these people well, but I knew others only through stories. Either way, these photographs made me feel at home; they confirmed that I belonged to a family—a social structure larger than myself.

Many of our students have not experienced the "table of family photographs." Some may not know their immediate family members, let alone those family members who are separated from them by circumstance or death. For these students, this wall of work and photographs ties them to a classroom community—a source of stability in their frequently changing lives.

Prior to this experience, the photographs in which most students see themselves are posed and artificial portraits or snapshots. In the classroom photographs I take of my students, they see themselves as active readers and writers—a type of self-image that is new to many, and that remains a year-long reminder of who they can be.

When parents visit my classroom, often for open house, they are surprised to see photographs of their children reading and writing. It is reassuring for them to see their children in a positive context as an integral part of a learning community. In response, the parents become more supportive of their children's reading and writing. The community of learners is complete.

George T. Tennison, III, E. A. Olle Middle School, Houston, Texas

Senior Valedictory Videos

One thing I did this year which has caught on like a forest fire was to introduce senior valedictory videos.

Seniors were given one and a half weeks to prepare a video or PowerPoint presentation in which they talked about who they are today; how they've changed since their freshman year; who helped them to change; who their best friends are and how those friends helped the seniors; which teachers helped them achieve their potential; special memories; future plans; a great literary quote that has meaning for them; favorite book/poem/drama; what they learned at the high school - not just academic; and what they want to say to their friends prior to graduation.

Results were incredible, and those with editing facilities were fantastic! They incorporated music that was meaningful to them, clips of home videos, photos and collages, interviews—I asked for ten minutes and most tried to give me 30. Parents called and thanked me for assigning this; one parent bought PowerPoint just so her daughter's presentation could run continuously during their open house

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after graduation. Others are duping the tapes to send to grandparents and others. Parents cried. Students cried. It was a love fest.

I got this idea from Greg Schroeder on the NCTE-talk listserv and adapted it for my school. It worked wonderfully, and everyone was so impressed!

Other ideas—students can create videos of literary works, presenting their term papers visually. These can be kept by the school and used as aids for students who are struggling or who need tutoring.

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FOCUS ON WRITING

Creating Independence through Group Writing

Getting a classroom full of seventh-grade boys to produce creative writing can be a challenge. I decided to try cooperative group writing with my students. I designed a project that would require my students to use cooperative learning, genre analysis, brainstorming, and art to create their own modern day fables. Through this project, students would begin to acquire skills that would help them become independent writers.

On the first day, before grouping the students, I presented a minilesson using Aesop's fables as models. After reading through several carefully selected fables, I initiated a discussion about the features of the genre.

With some coaxing, students began to see common threads, and I listed these on the board. First they noticed that the characters were animals and that our fables had no more than two characters.

Next they picked up on the fact that the characters displayed human attributes. The animals could talk and had personality traits like greed, courage, or wisdom.

I guided students through the next stage, which was seeing that the human qualities were limited to one per character, and each character's trait was in opposition to the other. A foolish character would be paired with a wise character or a diligent worker with a slacker. The brainstorming continued until our list was as complete as possible.

I then moved the discussion to the moral. Students defined the term *moral* using their prior knowledge, and then confirmed their definition by looking it up in the dictionary.

We talked about the purpose of morals and where we might find other examples in today's world. I explained that morals could be *stated*, like Aesop's, or *implied*, as we had seen in previous reading of literature.

I wrote several of Aesop's morals on the board, and the students added their own. Their list included some original interpretations like "Better to have friends than enemies" and "Never trust a practical joker."

They also included variations of old adages like "Be thankful for what you get" and "Beware of who you trust." One of the more creative students came up with "Better to be capable and silent than to be a bragger and fail."

The final step that day was reviewing the essential elements of plot. I explained to students that they would be required to write a fable that told a good story with a problem and resolution. They would need to select two animal characters, place them in a modern setting to make it relevant, and include dialogue. Their moral would be stated at the conclusion of their fable. I reminded them that Aesop's fables were brief, and their pieces should be brief too—an appealing idea to many students.

On the second day, I grouped the students in twos and threes. To assign group roles and manage logistics, I relied on ideas from Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec's COOPERATION IN THE CLASSROOM (Interaction Book Company, 1991). I selected the groups and kept the numbers small to facilitate their first attempt at group writing. I paired higher-achieving students with lower-achieving students and gave group members assigned tasks. One would be the recorder/scribe responsible for filling in the prewriting form and transcribing the completed story. Another student would be responsible for creating the artwork with input from the group. In groups with three students, there was a leader or facilitator who had to make sure the process ran smoothly and everyone participated.

The groups received a fable prewriting form. (See the handout sheet on Page 13.) It consisted of a partial list of the human qualities discussed the previous day with space to brainstorm additional characteristics. The students also had to brainstorm a list of at least ten animals as possible characters. Finally, they completed an outline that included selected traits, the animals that would have those traits, the setting, problem, resolution, and moral. By using this form, the students were guided through the prewriting process and learned to compromise along the way.

I supervised the groups and offered guidance when needed. Some groups required more help than others, but I used questioning strategies to guide their decision making that left them feeling ownership once they reached consensus.

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The students needed several days to complete the writing process. Once the stories were finished, they worked on their illustrations. Guidelines were simple: the picture had to relate to the text, and the illustrations could not be offensive. A preliminary sketch was required, subject to my approval. The drawings were done on letter-size drawing paper, and students were free to use markers, crayons, colored pencils, or pen and ink to complete their artwork. The writing checklist included here was used by students to monitor the work in progress and by me as a final assessment tool.

Group Writing Checklist

	Yes	No
Prewriting:		
Brainstormed human qualities	___	___
Brainstormed animals	___	___
Listed two human qualities	___	___
Listed two animals	___	___
Listed modern setting	___	___
Plot summary—problem	___	___
Plot summary—resolution	___	___
Plot summary—moral	___	___
Writing:		
Contains dialogue	___	___
Uses good sentences	___	___
Holds the reader's interest	___	___
Contains few errors	___	___
Has a clear problem	___	___
Solves the problem	___	___
States the moral	___	___
Artwork:		
Relates to the story	___	___
Is visually interesting	___	___

Since I did not have a classroom computer at that time, I took the stories home and prepared them for display and publication on my home computer. (On later projects, students have been able to word process their own writing on the classroom computer or in the school's computer lab.)

Copies for public display were created in a 16-point font with titles and authors' names in bold. Morals were in italics at the end of each fable. Publication copies were then reduced to a 14-point font, since the class anthology would be a text-only publication.

When the writing and artwork were completed, the students mounted their fables and illustrations on 18" × 24" inch sheets of construction paper. The fables were laminated and displayed in the school library. The text portion was copied and bound as an anthology and presented to the students at the end of the project. The laminated fables became a "Big Book" in my classroom library at the end of the year.

Here are two student fables produced during this project.

The Mouse and the Rat

One sunny day a mouse was talking to the fastest rat in that part of town when all of a sudden a woman dropped a piece of cheese on the other side of the sidewalk. Both saw the cheese at the same time.

The mouse was very wise, and the rat was naive and foolish. The mouse challenged the rat to a race. The rat said, "You can start the race."

The mouse said, "Ready, set, go!" Now the rat took off as fast as he could, but the mouse just stood there. As soon as the rat reached the middle of the street, a bus ran over it. SPLAT!

The mouse waited until the traffic cleared, crossed the street safely, and ate the cheese.

Moral: *Ye best look both ways before crossing the street.*

The Pony and the Clydesdale: A Poetical Fable

Down the home way
Two horses compete for pulling hay.
"Why, sister, don't you see
What the end of this will be?"
The pony, meager and short,
Had not the breath to snort.
The Clyde, so big and true,
Didn't have the "want to."
So the pony will take the job.
He's the one with the heart,
With the courage, and the power.
The other one stands alone
in the flowers.

Moral: *If you really want to, size doesn't matter.*

Publishing and displaying their end products were strong positive reinforcements for these reluctant authors. The group approach gave them the opportunity to be creative with a safety net. With an increase in confidence, they could cross the bridge to independent writing more easily.

Moral: *When faced with a room full of reluctant writers, try group fable writing*

Christine Hansen, Bastrop Independent School District, Bastrop, Texas

Fable Assignment Prewriting Form

Student Names:

____

____

____

Human Qualities

courage and cowardice
wisdom and foolishness
honesty and dishonesty
kindness and unkindness
pride and humility

Brainstorm at least three other pairs:

______________ and ______________
______________ and ______________
______________ and ______________
______________ and ______________

Brainstorm Ten Animals

1. ______________
2. ______________
3. ______________
4. ______________
5. ______________
6. ______________
7. ______________
8. ______________
9. ______________
10. ______________

Group Fable Outline

The pair of human qualities our characters will represent are:

A. ______________ and B. ______________

We chose the following animals to represent these qualities:

A. ______________ and B. ______________

Our modern setting is: ______________________________

____

Plot Summary

Problem: ______________________________

____

Resolution: ______________________________

____

Moral: ______________________________

____

TEACHER TALK

Teaching about the American Civil War

I am putting together a unit based on the American Civil War. What I have so far is *ACROSS FIVE APRILS*, *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*, and *GONE WITH THE WIND* (which we'll watch after I split the book up, everyone reads a section, and the whole class creates a story map on bulletin board paper). I also plan on breaking students into groups and having them research events around a part of the war and then creating a newspaper for the period, after an introduction to basic journalism.

I am also going to try to find a short story called "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." I teach ninety-minute blocks for the first time this year and am looking to make this a nine-week unit.

I would like suggestions on further Civil War readings, including other novels, short stories, poetry, and the like. Also, I'd like information if anyone has done a similar unit and would like to share. I am creating the unit for middle school students. Thanks.

Paula Ball
pkball@earthlink.net

You can download "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce at several places on the Web, including the following site:

http://www.accd.edu/sac/english/bailey/bierce.htm

Do a search at www.google.com and you'll find a lot of support for teaching "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge."

Gloria Pipkin
gpipkin@i-1.net

Get a copy of *PINK AND SAY*, a picture book that you and your students will love. It looks to be too young for your students, but it isn't. It is about a friendship between two Union soldiers—one is African American and one is white. You can buy it in the children's section at your local bookstore.

Margaret E. Kelly
Kellmgt@aol.com

There's a wonderful short story that I used to teach. The story was "Horseman in the Sky" by Ambrose Bierce. It is about a boy who decides to fight for the North while his father fights for the South. The ending is a great one for discussion and always worked well with my classes.

Stacie Valdez
stvaldez@onemain.com

I recommend *BLACK, BLUE, AND GRAY: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR* and *WELCOME TO ADDY'S WORLD, 1864: GROWING UP DURING AMERICA'S CIVIL WAR*. I also recommend reading material from slave narratives, including Frederick Douglass's *NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AN AMERICAN SLAVE* and others. Many slave narratives can be found by doing a Web search. The following sites include slave narratives:

http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/abhp.html

http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/JACOBS/hjhome.htm

http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/specialneh.html

Dale Allender
NCTE Associative Executive Director (Secondary Level)
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Corrections

The affiliation for Kathleen Pierce, co-author of "The Stories that Make Us Who We Are" (August 2001), should have read "Souhagen High School, Amherst, New Hampshire."

One co-editor's name was inadvertently omitted from the credit line for *MAKING AMERICAN LITERATURES IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE, from which the excerpt* "The Puritans Have Nothing to Do with My Life" was taken. (August 2001). Peter Shaheen and Anne Ruggles Gere coedited that volume.

EXCERPTS

Helping Students Love Language through Authentic Vocabulary Instruction

This excerpt is from Chapter 5 of DANCING WITH WORDS: HELPING STUDENTS LOVE LANGUAGE THROUGH AUTHENTIC VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION *by Judith Rowe Michaels (NCTE 2001).*

When it's the last period on a Friday, ninth graders do not want to stay in their seats, let alone discuss anything as abstract as language. The obligations of Monday are far off. These kids have already jumped into the weekend, into fantasy, into another kind of time and space. So we might as well try to make use of this particular kind of energy.

If we can free them up a little, physically—disorient them—they'll be readier to take language into their bodies, or even to find it there and instinctively translate it into words.

Erik Erikson writes well about leaping—both the physical and the imaginative kinds: "To truly leap, you must learn how to use the ground as a springboard, and how to land resiliently and safely. It means to test the leeway allowed by given limits; to outdo and yet not escape gravity; . . . to leap into make believe and yet be able to return to factual reality."

I'm suddenly remembering a collection of photographs of various famous individuals jumping. There were demure jumps, frantic jumps, exuberant jumps, anxious jumps. All the jumpers were adults. Young children are the best jumpers, especially in public; they don't seem worried about how they look or why they are jumping.

Ninth graders need more encouragement—even the basketball players. They want desperately to pass for "normal." They aren't yet as nostalgic for childhood spontaneity as twelfth graders are, or at least they aren't as ready to admit it, and they're less willing to trust that a teacher's craziness might lead them some place they'd like to go.

They remember the lid that was kept on them in junior high school—the little leeway they had for all their energy and what happened when they tested the limits; they may not yet have experienced much independence as learners. And if the "vocabulary" they encountered came in workbooks rather than in the context of speech and writing, they probably don't feel very possessive about the words they have learned.

If we can free them up a little, physically—disorient them—they'll be readier to take language into their bodies, or even to find it there and instinctively translate it into words.

This is also a means of discovering the good actors, dancers, the instinctive movers and clowns in the class and giving them some recognition. It signals that spontaneity and inventiveness will be valued in the classroom. Students with these particular gifts, sometimes very restless individuals who communicate best with their bodies, may well not have won much favor with their teachers and may already be viewing school as a lost cause.

Introducing movement into a course that is basically about the written and spoken word makes an important connection for them—for everyone: that movement is a language and that speech is, in part, gesture.

In writing about "the flesh of language," David Abram says, "We . . . learn our native language not mentally but bodily."

To read the rest of this chapter, visit the *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* Web site at www.ncte.org/notesplus and click on "Excerpts" in the Web Extras box.

To order *DANCING WITH WORDS: HELPING STUDENTS LOVE LANGUAGE THROUGH AUTHENTIC VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION* by Judith Rowe Michaels (NCTE, 2001), call the NCTE Customer Service Department at 1-877-369-6283. Stock no. 10517-3125; price: $19.95 ($14.95 NCTE members.)

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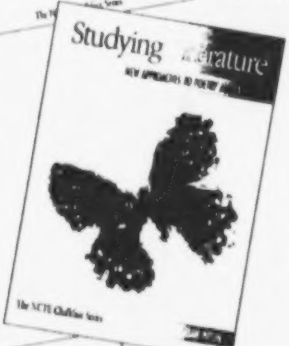
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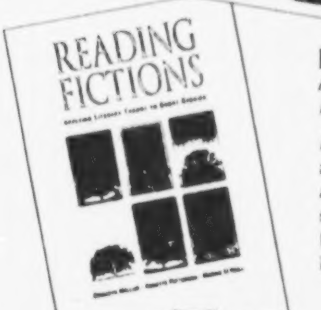

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A QUARTERLY OF TEACHING IDEAS JANUARY 2002

In This Issue

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Star Wars and the Hero's Journey
Focus on Media Literacy

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To make your description as useful as possible to *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* readers, we suggest that you consider questions like these as you prepare your submission: What are the goals of the activity or classroom practice? What makes it especially meaningful for you and your students? How do you introduce this idea to students? In what ways do their interests and ideas help direct the course of this activity? What natural progression does this activity usually follow? How are students encouraged to reflect on their learning? How do you judge this practice to be effective? How would you change your implementation of it in the future?

Please submit double-spaced, typed copy. Receipt of your submission will be acknowledged by postcard, but acknowledgment does not guarantee publication. We are unable to return manuscripts, so please keep a copy. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

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Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else.

—Gloria Steinem

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You'll find additional new teaching ideas in the Web Extras box on the *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* Web site at www.ncte.org/notesplus.

Photos of Isoke Titilayo Nia (top left), Katie Wood Ray (top right) and James W. Miles II (bottom right) by Bill Cronin, Cronin Photography

IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

This issue of *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* focuses on activities to lead even reluctant students into confident writing experiences. These include helping students warm up to poetry through the use of Bill Moyers's *POWER OF THE WORD* videos; using movement to aid relaxation and self expression; asking students to write advice columns; and inventing imaginary conversations for characters in Cynthia Voigt's novel *IZZY, WILLY-NILLY*. Other ideas touch on teaching Shakespeare, researching the 1920s, and drawing parallels between the *STAR WARS* trilogy and the universal *HERO'S JOURNEY*. In addition, the project described in "Focus on Media Literacy" has students examining how gender is portrayed in the media and turning their findings into a Web page.

We hope you'll find something in this issue to try out or adapt for your classroom. And as always, we invite the submission of your original teaching ideas to *CLASSROOM NOTES PLUS* by mail or e-mail. For details, check the submission guidelines inside the front cover of this issue.

Listening for "Sizzling Pickles"

I have enjoyed using Bill Moyers' *POWER OF THE WORD* videos in my poetry class. While students are watching each video, I have them listen for and record striking language and ideas in their notebooks from authors such as Li-Young Lee, Joy Harjo, Galway Kinnell, and Octavio Paz. Many students successfully snag well over forty favorites from one video. They select lines with luminous language, provocative ideas, fresh figures of speech, or scintillating sounds. One of my students, Nate, coined the phrase "sizzling pickles," and we have come to use it as our quick reference for this activity: "Listen for 'sizzling pickles.'"

When the video is over, I have students select three of their favorite lines and we share these out loud up and down each row, one at a time. I tell them not to worry if someone ahead of them "takes" the one they were going to say; they get to (and must!) proclaim it again.

Likewise, I will stop at several points along the way when I hear a real "winner," and poll the class to see if anyone else has chosen that particular one. When students look around and see 10–20 waving hands all affirming their own selection, they begin to have confidence in their own ability to recognize quality in language. The repetition, auditory and visual, works magic!

Soon students realize that most people do have a capacity to recognize quality when they see it, or in this case, hear it. A class "standard" for quality begins to emerge—and proves invaluable later on when students and I begin to assess each other's writing. We have a better understanding of why one poem might be appraised as "adequate" or "okay," while another is definitely "high-quality" or "great." We all feel less tortured about the process of "rating" a poem.

When students are ready to start sharing some of their own work out loud in class, I have them return to their notebooks, record the names of their peers, and once again, listen for and write down two or three examples of fine writing from each poem they hear.

When the presenter has finished reciting his or her poem, I ask a different row of students each time to tell us all what they wrote down. It's a wonderful opportunity for the writer to receive feedback; it helps hone listening skills; it reinforces the teaching of poetic devices; it builds community and fellowship; and once again, hearing the repeated selection of good writing speaks to upholding a standard for quality.

We also use these phrases which students record for another assignment called "Borrowing a Line." Students select a favorite from their video choices or from their peers' poems and use it as the catalyst for a poem of their own. It can show up anywhere in their own poem: the title, the first or last line, a refrain, etc.

This assignment provides an excellent opportunity to teach documentation skills as well. Students must always credit their sources of inspiration. What an absolute joy it is to watch the face of a student who hears his well-crafted words surface in the brand-new poem of a fellow student.

Patricia Mosco Holloway, Douglas County High School, Castle Rock, Colorado

Making Magic with Shakespeare

Remember as a young child the pleasure of finding that old chest in the attic containing dress-up treasures from a past time? The delight of suddenly becoming someone else by merely putting on the lacy hat or veil of a Victorian lady or a three-cornered hat of a Revolutionary patriot was liberating. You were no longer held to the conventions of your everyday world and its expectations, and you became someone completely different.

This is the experience that can happen with a classroom of high school sophomores as they experience drama as a multi-dimensional experience.

This is what my tenth-grade English class encountered as they entered the magical world of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, thanks to the Folger Shakespeare Library. In the book *SHAKESPEARE SET FREE* (The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1995), I found many of the good ideas described here, including the idea of using the second scene with the

▶

mechanicals planning their play for the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. As the students read their scripts, they jot down words they don't know and we talk about the meanings as a group. Then we decide on parts and run through the scene.

The students are immediately on their feet reading. After a trial run, we talk about what happened, what the characters are like, where they are, and how we might set up the entrances, exits, positioning, and movement to convey the mood, character, and message of the scene.

At this time we also discuss any changes in word meanings that we had guessed at previously. Those of which we are still unsure, we jot down to look up later. Getting a feel for the Shakespearean lingo can be approached a number of ways. One is called line tossing. A section of text from scene one in which Egeus, Theseus, Hermia, and Demetrius have a conversation about Hermia's engagement to Demetrius is the focus of this exploration. Each line from the section is placed on a 3" x 5" card and distributed to various members of the group, and they memorize the line. Forming a circle, they say their line and toss a pillow to someone else in the circle. This is done over and over until everyone in the circle has said his or her line several times.

The students love the kinesthetic approach. Afterwards I ask them to write down as many lines as they can remember, and it's amazing how much they can recall. Because the poetry is so rhythmic and the word choice so dynamic, they begin to appreciate the flow of the language. After the memory activity, we then piece together what has happened in the passage. We also make some predictions about what might evolve as a result of what is happening so far.

Understanding the concept of subtext is very important when studying drama. What motivates a character? The comprehension of subtext begins with up-to-date situations. A statement is written on an index card. Then different readers read the statement using different subtexts. The rest of the group members try to guess the subtext.

There is no shortage of volunteers for this activity. Later, when students get the gist of how subtext works, they apply what they have learned using segments of the actual play.

Again, everyone wants to participate. Now it's time to understand how those Elizabethan pronouns and verb inflections work. The students break into pairs and write gossipy notes to each other, discussing what is happening with the lovers in the play.

I provide students a simple chart that helps them compare modern and Elizabethan pronouns and verbs. (Where we would say *you are, you were, you have, you had*, the Elizabethans would say *thou art, thou wast, thou hast, thou hadst*. Where we would say *I give the book to you*, they would say *to thee*, and so on.)

We review this together, and then students begin translating their conversation into Elizabethan English. To get my students started, I asked them to work in pairs. They began by writing gossipy notes to each other about the lovers in the play. For example, one might write: I think Hermia should be very careful before she decides to defy her father. The partner might answer, No, you're wrong, she should run away to be with her love, Lysander. After a few notes back and forth, they tackle translating the notes into Elizabethan English.

Next, students read their conversations out loud, which keeps the whole group in stitches. They point out each other's errors, and by the time we have read all the conversations, they are becoming comfortable with this aspect of the original language.

Keeping the lovers straight is no easy task in this midsummer madcap mishap. On the bulletin board, using large index cards, we place the lovers' names in the formation of a diamond. Again, on smaller index cards we draw red arrows with markers. As the lover combinations change, we change the configuration of the arrows, showing who loves whom. That way we have a visual display of the situation from scene to scene.

The crowning glory of the entire enterprise is our prop box. Hats, crowns, a set of ass ears for Bottom's translation, wands, fairy wings, and other props are passed around, converting a group of 21st-century teens into fantasy characters from ancient Greece, spouting Elizabethan banter.

This is when the transformation takes place. You are no longer you but rather a fairy queen "enamoured of an ass." Or you are a pair of lovers breaking up. Or you are two former best friends desperately trying to patch up a long-time friendship. Or you are a magical sprite, enjoying "what fools these humans be." The magic has happened.

All of these activities and many more build to a final dramatic presentation as the students work in acting companies. It is in these cooperative meetings that plans are made, problems are tackled, and practice makes perfect. The process yields learning about Shakespeare and provides fun for all, including the teacher.

Thinkest thou that Shakespeare is dead, or at the very least boring, unimaginative, and irrelevant? Think again. He is very much alive in the 21st-century. He has been set free, and with his liberation through drama, we, too, are set free to explore and enjoy.

In addition to *SHAKESPEARE SET FREE*, I credit some of the ideas here to the article Harry Tuttle posted to the Teaching Ideas page of the NCTE Web site, "Keeping Track of the Lovers in *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*." *(This Web page is temporarily unavailable as NCTE revamps its Web site.)*

Linda H. Light, Tazewell High School, Tazewell, Virginia

Experimenting with Point of View

I got some of these ideas from Mitzi Merril's presentation "Helping Your Struggling Students Become Better Readers and Writers." The books were suggested to me by members of the online NCTE discussion group Talk-middle.

I introduce the concept of point of view during our short story unit. (In my district, we teach literature by genre.) During our reading of various short stories, I ask my students to identify the point of view and to describe how the story would be changed if the point of view were to be altered. After discussing point of view in this manner for several weeks, they are ready to try out different points of view themselves.

First, I ask students to freewrite a personal narrative. The topic is their choice, but the story must involve one other person. Then, I read to them Jon Sciezka's picture book *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, which tells the classic story from the point of view of the wolf.

We talk about the original story, and how the story changes based on the point of view. I also read to them *Encounter* by Jane Yolen, a picture book that tells about the coming of Columbus from the point of view of the Taino culture. This prompts active discussion and questioning.

The next day, I ask for them to share their stories with at least one other person. Then I ask them to take the story and retell it from another person's point of view. I model this for students using the overhead projector. I write a different story each time (and it usually has to do with my dog).

Some students are able to begin writing right away with no trouble, but there are always a few students who don't think they know how to look at the issue from a different point of view. When this happens, I ask these students to role-play with another student and try to imagine things that the other person would say. This usually gives them enough ideas to get started. I have students share those stories with the same partner as before.

At this point we are ready to begin the fun part! This requires several packages of construction paper in white and black as well as pens with black ink and gel pens that will show up well on black paper. I buy two packages of a brand called Milky Gel Pens and ask students to share. (These are cheapest bought in sets of 6 or 8 at large office supply stores.)

I ask students to revise and edit their stories in groups, and then they write their stories neatly on the black and white construction paper. They write one point of view on the white paper with a black pen and the other point of view on the black paper with a milky pen. Then they decorate their stories and we display them. This project has worked well with 7th, 9th, and 10th graders.

Here are some ideas I've had for adding to this unit:

- Take the stories one step further by writing a two-voiced poem. This is a poem that is read aloud and requires two speakers. This poem embodies the idea of point of view because it is usually about one topic or theme, but from two different voices, or points of views. For some good examples, see Tom Romano's *Blending Genre, Altering Style* and Paul Fleishman's *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*.
- After the first stories are complete, ask students to write a reflective piece. Ask students to tell you what they learned from the process of having to "become" another person in order to write from that point of view.
- Have students write letters to themselves using the other person's point of view, and vice versa. Having to address the other party directly in a letter brings home the idea more and makes it much more personal. It also provides letter-writing practice.
- Have students create a dramatic scene, complete with dialogue and props, out of their story. They could even create "acting companies" and each group could choose one student's story to perform for the class.

Leah K. Esker, Putnam City High School, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Characters and Speculations

I was introduced to this idea in a college-level creative writing class. I've found it very effective in teaching character development to high school students.

Students who have a sense of how their characters will react in situations of conflict generally have an easier time with narrative writing. I introduce this idea by getting students to speculate how a friend or family member would react in a stressful situation. Then they speculate about a reaction that that person would *not* have—I make the point that, when we contemplate a response or action that doesn't fit a given person, we generally say the response or action is "out of character."

In this exercise, students try to imagine what a given character would or would not do in a situation. First, each student draws a simple character, either on a sheet of paper or on a balloon. In the next step, they make their characters "come alive" by introducing them to their classmates. The questions that follow can be used as a guide for those who struggle with generating a response:

1. What is your character's name? Age? Sex? Occupation?

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2. Describe some daily routines in the life of your character.
3. What types of novels or magazines would your character read? What kind of music would he or she prefer?
4. How would your character react if coffee were spilled on him or her?
5. How would your character respond if asked for a date?
6. What would your character fear? Love? Hate?
7. Describe your character's clothes.
8. Identify one word that would best describe your character.
9. Identify some of your character's mannerisms.

The character's attitudes and personality may also be described, but students should be encouraged to use specific details to support their descriptions.

After character introductions, groups of two to four students decide how their characters will interact together in situations of conflict. Students may enjoy generating their own ideas for conflicts; some examples of possible conflicts are as follows:

1. The character is changing a flat tire.
2. The character is involved in or witnessing a fight.
3. The character is stuck in an elevator.

A suitable assignment at this stage would be a one-scene story from each group, and a follow-up assignment could include a short story assignment involving a number of scenes.

These activities help make imaginary characters come to life for students, and make them better able to appreciate character development in fiction, as well as better able to develop their own characters in creative writing.

Gerard Landry, Saint Patrick High School, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada

Relaxation Leads to Expressive Writing

Even if the teacher arrives at the classroom armed with wisdom, an arsenal of sound educational strategies, a positive attitude, and plenty of coffee, it's often not enough.

For one thing, students are parked in rigid chairs behind their desks for most of their days, which good teachers know is not conducive to optimum learning. In addition, many of our students are bringing with them more than just their previous experiences, knowledge, attitude, and ability. They're also bringing their fatigue, stress, and distractions.

Many of them face conflict at home. Other stresses may include peer pressure, feelings of inadequacy, or of being overwhelmed by that which they do not understand. I know that the recent terrorist attacks have left my fifth-grade students confused and even worried about their own safety. This is the invisible baggage that can cause a great deal of anxiety in a young mind. Children do not know how to deal with these feelings, and it is our responsibility as adults to help them.

In an attempt to help relax students, relieve anxiety, and better prepare them for learning, I decided to try something that had worked in my personal life—yoga.

Pranayama, asanas, and *savasana,* all terms used in the practice of yoga, are not exactly educational terminology frequently used in the conservative town of Alvin, Texas. I realized that it would be a good idea for me to do a bit of preparation before beginning.

I explained to my principal that what I wanted to do with my students essentially involved controlled deep breathing, stretching, and relaxing/visualizing to music. My rationale was to focus, relax, and inspire, and eventually to lead to more relaxed, expressive creative writing. I explained that to forestall any parental objections I would not use the Sanskrit yoga terms, that I would keep the activity secular, and that I would obtain written parental permission before getting started. She agreed, and after I had received the signed parental permission forms, I introduced the new exercises to my students.

I modified the practices considerably for use in the classroom from the more authentic Yoga I practice in my personal time.

Initially I thought it would be useful to conduct a brief session of exercises that involved breathing, stretching, and visualizing every day, but as the reality of a busy school schedule set in, there just wasn't time. Now I conduct this classroom activity two or three times a week. The process doesn't take more than 10 minutes once the students are used to it. I try to pick a quiet time of the day to minimize interruptions.

Controlled Breathing

The controlled breathing works like this: I have the students sit in an upright position in a chair with hands placed on the top of the thighs and feet flat on the floor. I explain what we're going to do before we start. A simple breath ratio like 6:3:6 or 8:4:8 is a good place to begin. The students close their eyes and breath in for six counts, hold or retain their breath for three counts, and then breath out for six counts. I count gently, out loud for them, snapping

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my fingers as I go, just as my own instructors have done. I do this for about ten rounds. The concentration on their faces is a sight to see. And I have 100 percent participation.

Stretching

Once we complete the breathing exercise, we move on to stretching. For classroom stretching, it's important to take into account modesty, flexibility, and the fact that youthful overenthusiasm could result in an injury. I usually just pick one or two simple stretches to use at a time. Below are short descriptions of several that I have found to be safe and effective.

Though these are simple, I would suggest consulting a book on yoga that contains photos or diagrams to be sure that you are instructing students accurately. The public library is an excellent source of ideas for postures and stretches that are doable with kids. Some good books are *YOGA FOR DUMMIES* by George Feurstein and Larry Payne (IDG Books, 1999); *YOGA JOURNAL'S BASICS* by Mara Carrico (H. Holt, 1997); and *CHILDREN'S BOOK OF YOGA: GAMES AND EXERCISES MIMIC PLANTS, ANIMAL AND OBJECTS* by Thia Luby (Clear Light, 1998).

Cat/dog tilt—Begin on the hands and knees with the back straight. Inhaling, lift the head, drop the belly. Exhaling, drop the head, round the back and tuck the tailbone. Repeat this several times. (This, of course, mimics a cat stretching.)

Hero—Stand up straight and spread the legs apart a bit more than shoulder distance. Bring the arms overhead, and put the palms together. Turn the right foot out 90 degrees and the left foot in 45 degrees. Turn the trunk of the body the same direction as the right foot is pointing. Exhale and bend the right knee until the top of the right thigh is parallel to the floor. Stretch the left leg back. Hold this for about 10 seconds and repeat on the other side.

Camel Pose—Kneel on the knees with the knees and feet hip distance apart. Turn the toes under so the heels face up. Place the hands on the lower back with the fingers pointing down. Press the hips forward, lift the chest, and drop the head back. Reach back with the right hand and clasp the right heel; reach back with the left hand and clasp the left heal. Hold this for about 20 seconds.

Hand to Foot—Stand up straight and as you exhale bend forward at the hips, sliding your hands down the backs of your legs. Go as far as you can reach. With a firm grip, breathe in and lift the head, lengthen the spine, exhale and fall forward again. Repeat about five times.

Visualizing

Finally, I have the students lie down on the floor. I'm in the fortunate position of having carpeting in my classroom, so lying on the floor is no problem. If you don't have carpet, or if you don't have much room, ask the students to bring in towels, and put the chairs up to create more space. The students lie flat on their backs with their legs and arms outstretched slightly, palms facing up. Turn the lights down or off if you can. Play some soothing music for about three minutes and just let the students lie quietly listening, letting their minds relax and roam freely.

The purpose of the practice is to get the students' imaginations moving and to allow them to do some visualization. Interesting, calm music can invoke pictures into the students' imaginations that, once the music has stopped, can be transported into writing. My students started off just writing a few lines, but as time has gone on, their pieces are becoming more elaborate and more vivid.

It's hard to prove that yoga techniques are actually helping students relieve anxiety. But I have made the following observations: Everyone participates. The students are enthusiastic. They always ask if we are going to do our "stretches" today. I have fewer discipline issues this year.

Of course, these could be a function of other factors, but my sense is that students both enjoy and benefit from these activities. And most exciting, the writings that students have done following our visualization periods are creative, spontaneous, and expressive.

Lisa White, Hood-Case Elementary School, Pearland, Texas

Dear Wendy

A project I've entitled "Dear Wendy" usually inspires even the most indifferent writers, by tapping into the sometimes tumultuous lives of middle schoolers. I photocopy advice columns geared toward teens with a wide variety of trials and tribulations—sibling problems, boy/girl relationships, family crises, and school conflicts.

First I start a class discussion on advice columns. Most of my students aren't regular Dear Abby or Ann Landers readers, but they can relate to seeking advice or counsel from others. We discuss the attributes of a good counselor or confidante. I ask students to brainstorm a list of desirable traits, and they usually come up with an impressive list—trustworthy, honest, hopeful, open-minded, a good listener, never trivializes the problem, uses humor, takes the problem seriously, etc.

Next we read a typical "Dear Wendy" inquiry that I display on the overhead. They pair up and share with a classmate to compose a suitable response using a friendly letter format.

After sharing and discussing our column responses aloud,

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we read the newspaper's Dear Wendy reply, and we feel that our responses compare favorably in content, depth of analysis, and richness of sentence structure.

At this point I distribute photocopies of Dear Wendy questions without the published answers. Students select a letter based upon their interest and ability to relate to the problem posed and begin an independent project. They compose their answers with special attention to a teen audience, using a warmhearted, empathetic opening, thoughtful suggestions for remediation, and a hopeful, upbeat closing.

Using old magazines, students cut individual letters, words, or phrases for the words of their responses and glue them onto white poster paper in a ransom-note style. Oftentimes the letters serve as springboards for some lively and heartfelt conversations, and the finished letters provide an attractive display for our school hallways.

Carol Kopacz, Simmons Middle School, Oak Lawn, Illinois

Experiencing the 1920s

When I started teaching four years ago, I struggled with the common problem of how to help my students relate to the distant time plots of the stories we covered in class.

Before our reading of *The Great Gatsby*, I came up with the idea of having each student take on the personality of someone from the 1920s and write a journal entry and perhaps even a short story about that person. Students would research details appropriate to the time period in books, posters, videos, and music that would be available in the classroom.

I have used this project with all of my classes—it's been a good learning experience, and all students enjoy learning about the "flappers" and "sheiks" of the 1920s.

There is extensive work that needs to be done before assigning the activity, in order to provide students with the research materials they will need.

First, you need to create informational posters that depict specific aspects of the 1920s, including fashion, music, sports, government, society, etc. (As an additional research project, you could have the students create these posters.)

These posters are an important part of the activity, because more than one student can refer to them simultaneously. To set up the activity, place the completed posters in various spots around the room where they will be easily accessible.

In addition to the posters, you can help students get into the mood of the 1920s by showing movie clips from *The Great Gatsby* and *The Untouchables*; include any other informational videos you can find that depict society during the 1920s. Your school's librarian or media specialist can be a helpful resource for this activity; ask him or her to help by locating a variety of books about the 1920s.

When I use this activity, I also like to play a CD of 1920s music in the background while the students are doing their research.

Once the materials are assembled, I explain to students that they will be taking on the personality of a person living in the 1920s. Each student takes on a personality such as the one described below and uses the various resources as research aids in writing an authentic 2–4-page journal entry from the point of view of that person.

I encourage students to use slang words and phrases from the time, and to use as many additional references from the time period as they can locate. After students have completed their research and writing, I ask for volunteers to share their journal entries with the class.

I provide a dozen or so sample personalities such as the one below, but students could also be asked to create their own personality from scratch.

> Sample Personality: You are a 21-year-old female student living in Manhattan and enrolled at the local university. It is 8:00 p.m. on a Friday night and you want to go out. Based on your research, respond to the following questions in your journal when you return home from your evening activities. Where did you go? Whom did you go with? What did you wear? What did you do when you arrived there? Whom else did you see? What did you talk about? Include additional details describing your evening.

This activity is extremely flexible, and you can make a variety of adjustments to fit your own needs, including changing the time period, providing additional types of research materials (art prints, recorded music, facsimile documents, photographs, etc.), and so on.

Brenda Eisenhardt, Pequannock Township High School, Pompton Plains, New Jersey

Imagined Conversations

"But what did they say to each other?" lamented our students, while reading the young adult novel, *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* by Cynthia Voigt.

They were noticing that sometimes there are conversations in works of fiction that the reader knows have taken place, but never gets the chance to read. A bright idea popped into our heads: this could become a great lesson. Since we were both using the same novel with our English classes, we put our heads together and came up with this

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activity, which helps relieve the frustration that our students had been experiencing. It can be adapted for use with any novel taught in the classroom, with just a little teacher preparation.

First, we came up with a list of 10 possible conversations that could have taken place in the book. We listed these on a handout sheet, which we gave to the students. (See student guidelines on page 9.)

Next, students were placed in groups of two or three and asked to write scripts for their chosen conversations, noting stage directions and gestures and using language that would be appropriate for the characters.

The only rules we gave the students were that they had to stay true to the characters they were going to portray and that no new characters were to be introduced. Students then used these scripts to perform their conversations in front of the class.

This activity has helped our students better understand the characters that we are reading about, while also giving them a chance to put their own scenes into the story, thus increasing their sense of involvement in their reading. This activity also seemed to help improve the dialogue students create when writing their own short stories.

We've both found that months later, when we are covering other writings, our students will ask if they can write imagined conversations again.

Jennifer Shorter-Lee, Crosby Middle School, Louisville, Kentucky, and Vicki Catlin, Louisville Male High School, Louisville, Kentucky

TEACHER TALK

LORD OF THE FLIES

I have worked through two-thirds of *LORD OF THE FLIES* with my students with pretty good success, but I feel we have spent too much time trying to make sure everyone understands what is going on in the novel. The depth of Golding's writing scares some students—literal meaning is sometimes lost due to the creative nature of his descriptions. It has been a challenge.

I was wondering if anyone had ideas for review materials for the novel. I have been quizzing to try and keep kids reading and then we've done some collaborative work with specific passages that help establish meaning. I am trying to figure out if I can do something out of the ordinary with these last chapters. Any ideas?

Ted Baechtold
abaechto@bloomington.in.us

LORD OF THE FLIES is probably my favorite freshman/sophomore book to teach. I never do the same thing twice, and it seems as though no matter what I do, the students enjoy it.

Last time I did a lot of work with key quotes. We'd read a juicy section aloud together and then students were asked to say "stop" every time they thought we got to an especially significant quote. Then we'd stop and explore the sentence(s) chosen in detail.

Meanwhile I'd be recording these key quotes on overheads for later use. With mine and theirs, we had about 50 very solid quotes. Students journaled, discussed, and drew responses to quotes. The culminating activity this time was a thematic graphic based on the reading, using a minimum of seven supporting quotes. Students worked in pairs and produced some absolutely dynamite stuff. They presented their artwork to classmates and this served as part of the wrap-up for the book.

I also collect 12 to 16 Latinate vocabulary words and relevant literary terms per week for vocabulary study. The review for the culminating vocabulary test is a "Jeopardy"-type game which the students design, create, and use in class. Time-consuming, but fun and worthwhile.

Stephanie Bearden
swbearden@yahoo.com

Try looking at http://school.discovery.com. They have units set up on literature (complete with standards), including *LORD OF THE FLIES*. There is also a link to create various puzzles (crosswords, wordfinds, etc.) that are related to the book. I'm in the process of setting up that unit for next year.

Closing the unit is going to be interesting, and I haven't exactly decided how to do it yet. I'm thinking about FLIMIBUFF (See http://www.iop.com/~grimaldi/newworld.htm). It looks like it would be a good culminating exercise involving teamwork.

Sarah Davis
sdavis@cedarvalley.org

Imagined Conversations: Guidelines for Students

Your assignment is to write an imagined conversation. An imagined conversation is one that the reader knows has taken place from various clues in the story, but that the author has not actually included in the text. The following are the requirements for this assignment:

- Work in pairs or groups of three.
- Your conversation must be *at least two or three minutes long*, so you should have a few pages worth of conversation. You will be performing your conversation in front of the rest of the class before the end of the class period.

Here's an example of an unacceptable conversation: "Hi, John." "Hey. How are you?" "I'm okay. Guess I'd better run. See you later" "Sure, see you later, Marco."

Notice that this conversation goes nowhere, reveals no new information about the characters or plot, and doesn't include any related details from the book.

In your conversation, try to reveal what you really think the characters were talking about. Practice your conversation after you've written it, to make sure it takes at least two or three minutes to perform. Also, use appropriate language that fits the character.

- Your conversation may only include characters from the book.
- You must stay true to the characters that you are portraying. For instance, in the case of Marco in *IZZY, WILLY-NILLY*, this means you can't make Marco a sweet and sincere guy, since we readers know he's not like that.

Here's a list of ideas for your imagined conversations. You can also look for your own ideas in the book:

- Suzy, Lisa, and Lauren after they visited Izzy in the hospital
- Rosamunde and her mother, after they visited Izzy
- Jack and Joel, as they drive home to visit Izzy
- Marco and Suzy at school, after the accident
- Marco, Tony Marcel, and another person (your choice: Deborah or John Wintersize)
- Izzy's mom, dad, and Francie, before Izzy is discharged from the hospital
- Mr. DePonte, Rosamunde, and Suzy at school
- Tony Marcel and Deborah
- Izzy's mom and dad, after meeting Rosamunde
- Francie talking to a friend or two at school about her new troubles at home (maybe Wendy, who is having a birthday party soon)
- Marco talking to friends (probably members of the football team)
- Another one that you come up with (okay it with me first)

You will have 20 to 30 minutes to work on this assignment. Please feel free to ask questions about anything you don't understand. You will be asked to turn in your completed, written conversations before you leave.

Using Poetry for Increased Understanding

Even as the new year begins, many teachers and students are still struggling to come to terms with the tragic events of the past September. Poetry activities on the Teaching Tolerance Web site (www.teachingtolerance.org) provide students a chance to think, talk, and write about world events in ways that increase their understanding, insight, and compassion.

Excerpt from "To Save a Nation and Its People" by Sara Cohan

Poets dedicate their craft to penning human emotion. They are artists of observation, watching how society turns and un-turns itself. Peoples' moods, subtle or not, do not escape the expert poet. The poet perceives the frailty of human nature yet can see the brilliance and strength of humanity. "What is poetry which does not save nations and peoples?" Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Milosz asked.

After reading and discussing poetry, students will articulate their own thoughts and emotions and become empowered to take action—whether it is writing thank-you notes to the firefighters in New York City, raising money for the American Red Cross, organizing a forum at their school to discuss anti-Muslim bias or assembling a rally supporting or opposing U.S. action in Afghanistan.

Classroom Activities

These activities, designed for middle or high school classrooms, can be adapted to a variety of subjects. Recommendations for discussion questions are included. The final component of the lesson suggests ways students can take action in their communities.

Julia Alvarez, W. H. Auden, and Emma Lazarus are highlighted in the lessons, but many poets could be used in their place, including Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, Seamus Heaney, Emily Dickinson, bell hooks, and Walt Whitman, to name just a few.

For the full text of Sara Cohan's article and classroom poetry activities, visit the Teaching Tolerance Web site at www.teachingtolerance.org and click on "September 11 and After" or visit http://www.tolerance.org/teach/expand/act/activity.jsp?cid=264.

Classroom Solutions

Bulletin Board Review

Since I teach in a windowless middle-school room, I feel it is especially important to have an inviting visual environment for my classroom.

I have one main bulletin board at the front of the room, which I use exclusively for whatever novel we are reading in class. I try to have it filled with visual images, whether from magazines or clip art, of key aspects of the novel, including also important quotes. I refer often to the bulletin board as we read.

To conduct a review of the novel, I divide the class into groups, give each group several of the pictures and quotes, and ask the students to discuss their significance to the book as specifically as they can, encouraging them to find the particular passages that are brought to mind. Students then appoint a scribe and spokesperson for their group, and each group presents the highlights of their discussion to the class.

This provides an effective novel review and, if students have any misunderstandings or questions about basic elements of the novel, allows the teacher a chance to provide guidance. This also provides an effective review of a novel before an exam, with key points presented and reinforced by students' peers. I find a picture can be a powerful anchor for memory.

Karen R. Bowie, Manchester, New Hampshire

STAR WARS and the Hero's Journey

Lucas devoured the great themes: epic struggles between good and evil, heroes and villains, magical princes and ogres, heroines and evil princesses.

—Charles Champlin in GEORGE LUCAS: THE CREATIVE IMPULSE (Harry N. Abrams, 1992)

Wearing footed pajamas and only 6 years old, I saw STAR WARS at a drive-in theater with my parents and my baby sister, thus beginning my life-long passion for George Lucas's creation.

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As each movie in the trilogy was released, my sister, cousins, neighborhood playmates, and I added more memorized quotes to our repertoires, calling each other "laserbrains" as Princess Leia dubs Han in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and referring to our German shepherd dog with another line by Leia from *Star Wars*, "Will somebody get this big walking carpet out of my way?"

As we matured past insulting one another and our dog, I began to internalize some of the more philosophical statements of the characters, particularly those of Yoda to Luke in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

The line, "Do or do not. There is no try," has become a tenant in my high school English classroom for committed work. I also teach lessons in believing in oneself and in others through an exchange from the same movie when Luke says skeptically, "I don't believe it," and Yoda's somber reply is, "That is why you fail." Clearly, these movies have influenced me, and as a result, they've touched my students.

It never occurred to me, however, to take the lessons of the *Star Wars* trilogy much further than putting up a few meaningful quotes on the bulletin board. It certainly didn't strike me that the connection I and so many others felt to the *Star Wars* story was due to its appeal to basic issues of human nature.

None of this became very clear to me, even in my repeated viewing of all three movies, until August of 2000 when I attended an exhibit at Chicago's Field Museum entitled, "*Star Wars*: The Magic of Myth."

As I perused the authentic costumes, noticed the storyboards outlining the plot according to specific steps on a hero's journey, and listened to the accompanying audio tour, an idea slowly began to dawn on me. I could teach some of the themes present in classic mythologies through *Star Wars*!

As the school year was about to begin, this exhibit could not have been more well-timed. Thus, I was called to my own adventure: one of creating a meaningful unit for my post-*Star Wars*-born students incorporating various classical legends and hero's stories with a modern-day equivalent, the *Star Wars* trilogy.

My first step was to create a study guide for my students entitled, "The Hero's Journey."

According to Mary Henderson, the exhibit's curator, there are 25 steps on this universal journey. I listed the steps for my students on their handout with brief definitions of each one and space enough beneath for them to provide specific examples from the texts we read and from the *Star Wars* movies we viewed. The steps are as follows:

1) The Call to Adventure
2) Threshold Guardians
3) The Wise and Helpful Guide and the Magic Talisman
4) Refusal of the Call
5) Passing the First Threshold
6) Hero Partners
7) Mystical Insight
8) The Labyrinth and the Rescue of the Princess
9) Losing the Guide
10) Hero Deeds and Dragon Slayers
11) The Dark Road of Trials
12) The Hunt
13) Into the Belly of the Beast
14) The Mystical Marriage
15) The Sacred Grove
16) Sacrifice and Betrayal
17) The Hero's Return
18) Resurrection
19) Monster Combat
20) The Resurgence of Evil
21) The Enchanted Forest and Helpful Animals
22) Descent into the Underworld
23) Atonement with the Father
24) Unmasking
25) Final Victory

Some students also began to personalize these steps by including examples from their own lives. Not wanting to veer too far from the texts at this point, I was nevertheless happy that we were on the road to embracing the relevance of mythology in our own lives.

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Help with Bibliographies

Founded by Neal Taparia, a student at Hinsdale Central High School in Chicago, Illinois, this Web site focuses on helping students create bibliographies. Students provide the site with information about sources, and with a couple of clicks, the site automatically creates a bibliography in the correct format. Of course students still need to learn how to create a bibliography from scratch, but once they've learned the basics, this site could serve as a time-saving tool, particularly for long papers requiring many bibliographic entries.

http://www.easybib.com

The decision of what texts to include as we made connections to the *STAR WARS* movies was difficult to make. However, the fact that the three movies utilize certain steps of the hero's journey in numerical order helped immensely. For example, *STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE*, the first of the trilogy, features plot elements that line up most readily with steps 1 through 10.

I was therefore able to choose ancient myths that most exemplified these particular steps, deciding on excerpts from the English legend, *KING ARTHUR AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE*, and the Greek myths of "Hermes," "Theseus," "Daphne," and "The Quest of the Golden Fleece."

After studying these myths and talking about the ways in which characters experience each of the stages on the journey, we viewed the movie *STAR WARS*. Students, taking notes and still filling out their "Hero's Journey" study guide, were amazed to discover all of the parallels between the ancient myths and the movie's futuristic characters paradoxically from "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away" (*STAR WARS*, opening scene).

When I assigned an 8–10-sentence paragraph in which students had to begin with a strong thesis sentence and then proceed by using specific examples such as character actions, descriptions, and circumstances in order to connect our ancient heroes with those in *STAR WARS*, my students amazed me with their brilliant ideas.

One boy compared Daphne's "Refusal of the Call" to Luke Skywalker's, pointing out how Daphne's resistance roots her to the ground, literally, when she turns into a tree, whereas Luke's merely gets him to the next step of "Passing the First Threshold," his own doubts as he leaves his home planet to learn the ways of The Force.

Another student made her connections between the "Mystical Insight" Theseus receives from the gull about changing his ways of looking at things and that of Luke's when Obi-Wan Kenobi introduces him to the ways of The Force.

Still another student compared Merlin and the sword in the stone to Obi-Wan Kenobi and the lightsaber, focusing on step number 3, "The Wise and Helpful Guide and the Magic Talisman."

Continuing through our unit, we studied the Greek myths "Cronos" and "Perseus" and moved into excerpts from *THE ODYSSEY*. Because all of these tales focus on the relationship between father and son, they beautifully parallel events contained in *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK* along with steps 11–16.

Again, students drew their connections by writing of how Cronos literally consumes his children, while Darth Vader consumes Luke figuratively by attempting to turn him to the Dark Side of The Force. This consumption naturally falls into the category of "Into the Belly of the Beast" from the study guide.

Other students wrote analytical descriptions of how Odysseus, Luke, Han, and Leia all experience "The Dark Road of Trials" through their long, dangerous, relentless set of tests designed to bring important understanding, despite the overwhelming nature of it all.

Still others picked up on the "Mystical Marriage" between Odysseus and Penelope as compared to that of Han and Leia, both relationships characterized by a survival of previous dark trials and by the sense that love itself is the ultimate call to adventure for certain characters in mythology.

Next, we studied the German tale "Siegfried," the Greek stories "Demeter and Persephone" and "Orpheus and Eurydice," and excerpts from the British legend *BEOWULF*.

Again, the connections my students made between these myths, *THE RETURN OF THE JEDI*, and steps 17–25 were astounding.

A few observations that students made on their study guides, which ultimately appeared in their papers and essay exams later on, include these:

> Siegfried returns to his own country just as Luke Skywalker returns to his home planet for "The Hero's Return."
>
> Persephone achieves "Resurrection" each Spring just as Han Solo is released from the carbonite in Jabba the Hutt's palace.
>
> Beowulf fights Grendel just as Luke battles the Rancor Monster for "Monster Combat."
>
> Orpheus makes his "Descent into the Underworld" to rescue his love, Eurydice, just as Luke descends into the Death Star to try and save his father, Darth Vader.

Clearly, my students had successfully grasped the concept of "The Hero's Journey" in an exciting fashion. Now it became time to personalize it all.

One of the culminating activities of this unit I designed was for each student to write a five-paragraph narrative piece on a part of his or her life that exemplified a heroic journey in his or her own myth.

I asked that the introduction contain an indication of what the student's particular "Call to Adventure" was and that each body paragraph cover three separate steps of the student's choice from the hero handout; the conclusion was to illuminate the "Final Victory."

Many students wrote on an event that helped to form their identities, others wrote on a specific task or goal they accomplished with difficulty but ultimate success, and some even wrote on a place that holds magic, mystery, and memories for them. It was wonderful how they were all able to see their own lives in the context of mythology, as stories in the common fabric of human existence.

Perhaps even more satisfying for me as a teacher was

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the last of the culminating activities accompanying this unit: the field trip I facilitated to Chicago's Field Museum for the *Star Wars* exhibit so my students could see how my idea was born.

Remembering my "Call to Adventure" to design this unit, I reflected on how my excitement was peppered with doubt, initially, at the validity or relevance of such an undertaking. Showing three movies in class? Trying to turn on a younger, perhaps critical, generation to something so dear to my heart? But I overcame these "Threshold Guardians" and pressed on in my journey.

"The Hunt" for the appropriate accompanying texts led to an "Unmasking" of the potential contained in studying mythology through *Star Wars*.

Ultimately, my "Final Victory" was found in student comments such as, "Miss P. I just wanted to tell you thanks, because I didn't know about these movies before, and they're really cool," as well as in the insightful connections they made in their writing.

But it also came, with much humor, when students, exhilarated from the beautiful museum, authentic costumes, and models of the spacecraft from the movies, came up to me almost breathless and bursting with news, telling me how the exhibit had the hero's steps my study guide contained. They didn't realize that, in fact, my study guide had the hero's steps the exhibit contained. With a wink, I told them, "Isn't it amazing how mythology works?"

Useful Resources

George Lucas: The Creative Impulse by Charles Champlin (Harry N. Abrams, 1992)

Literature. (Orange Level). Edited by Margaret Grauff Forst and Julie West Johnson. (McDougal, Littell & Company, 1989)

Mythology by Edith Hamilton (Little, Brown & Company, 1969)

Star Wars: The Magic of Myth by Mary Henderson (Bantam Books, 1997)

The Hero's Journey Web Site (www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey)

"Writing Stories on the Web with 'The Hero's Journey'" (PDF file) (http://dommy.com/az2nzau/docs/goln_paper.pdf)

Andrea Lee Permenter, Hubbard High School, Chicago, Illinois

FOCUS ON MEDIA LITERACY

Examining Images of Men and Women in the Media

This is a project I use toward the end of a unit on gender in the media. It's a collection of assignments that I've adapted from various sources that involve students in examining how gender is portrayed in the media. By the time I use this project with my students, they have already explored issues of gender stereotyping and have had discussions of why gender stereotyping is unhealthy—it creates false ideals that real people can't hope to live up to; it fosters low self-esteem for those who don't fit in; it restricts people's ideas of what they're capable of; and so on.

As presented here, part of the project goal is to turn the results of the research into a Web page, but the project could be revised so that students present pen-and-paper results instead.

Here are the guidelines I give students:

Assignment Sheet

For this project you will be examining images of men and women in the media, evaluating gender stereotypes, and in some cases, providing improved alternatives to the existing representations. You will need to present your findings in the form of a Web page.

Select a partner and choose one assignment from the following list.

Note that the following guidelines apply to the parts of each assignment: For part a, you may present your information in whatever way you think is most effective. For part b, your information must be presented in the form of prose paragraphs, with appropriate attention paid to language use, grammar, and punctuation. The style of writing will vary in part c, because the emphasis here is on creativity, but please pay attention to correctness regardless of the specific assignment.

1. Choose three female cartoon characters from newspaper comics and track them over a two-week period.

a) Summarize the storyline for each comic and record the gender issues that arise from the cartoon.

b) Evaluate how "fair," "equitable," and "realistic" each cartoon is. (1 paragraph per cartoon)

c) Perform a "girl cartoon character makeover" and rewrite and redraw one of the three comics to make the female character more realistic and equitable. Accompany your cartoon (of at least four frames) with a character sketch of your "new and improved" character.

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2. Select three animated films to view. (Recent examples include: *Anastasia*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Secret of Nimh*).

a) After watching each film, list the characters, their gender, their basic characteristics, and their involvement in the story.

b) Write one paragraph about each film, noting how males and females are portrayed.

c) Rewrite one of the stories, changing the gender of at least one of the major characters. Or, if you would rather, write an original fairy tale in which you illustrate gender stereotyping or the effects of gender stereotyping.

3. Research the stereotypic gender roles used in fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Examine the ideas of the "knight in shining armor" and the "happily ever after" statements. Some possibilities: *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, *Georgie Porgie*, *Jack Sprat*.

a) For each of the fairy tales or nursery rhymes, list the characters, their gender, their basic characteristics, and their involvement in the story.

b) In a multi-paragraph composition, citing specific examples from the fairy tales and nursery rhymes you look at, discuss the way gender is portrayed in the narratives you looked at. Are there stereotypes? How are they developed? How do you think such stereotypes affect children?

c) Choose one of the fairy tales or nursery rhymes and change the ending to update it to a more modern version without stereotypes. For instance, if you pick a fairy tale that has the perfect couple living happily ever after, use what you know about real life to write about what happened after they rode off into the sunset.

4. Select four songs that speak to you in some way about the issue of gender. Two should be modern and two should be songs that are at least a decade old.

a) For each song, write a short summary of the gender issues and stereotypes that are raised by the lyrics. Consider the audience of each song in your responses.

b) In a multi-paragraph composition, compare the two recent songs to the two older songs. Note any similarities or differences in terms of gender issues and comment on why you think they exist.

c) Choose one of the songs from each period (one old, one new) and rewrite the lyrics. Your new lyrics should be free of gender stereotypes (and free of any other stereotypes as well).

5. Collect and display at least 10 different ads for any one product (e.g., blue jeans, sports shoes, perfume or cologne) that teenagers buy.

a) Comment briefly on the images and values the advertisers are selling with the product. (one comment per ad)

b) Do a survey of 50 different teens and record their preferred brand of product. Develop two other questions that ask them to respond to each ad. Record your results in the form of a graph or chart. Write your conclusions up in paragraph form.

c) Create a full-page ad for your product that is effective and that promotes healthy, as opposed to stereotypical, images of men and women. Your ad must have a headline, a slogan, and a visual. It should be accompanied by a paragraph in which you comment on your objective and audience, and on why you think the ad is effective. If you prefer, you may create a spoof ad, a parody of one of the ads you chose. The same requirements apply. (For examples of spoof ads, visit the Adbusters Web site at http://www.adbusters.org.)

6. Spend some time watching the commercials that are shown during cartoons or programming for young children, and then watch the commercials that are on during prime time.

a) Develop some questions you will answer for each commercial: What is the type of product being advertised? What techniques are used to sell the product? Are there any stereotypical representations of men and women? Record your findings in the form of a chart or graph. Note any trends.

b) Pick out two from each time slot that you perceive to be gender-biased and that you believe are socializing children toward certain gender-specific roles or behaviors. Describe each one and comment specifically on the elements that you perceive to be gender-biased. (one paragraph per commercial)

c) Choose one of the four commercials and update it. Describe in detail what will happen during the "new and improved" commercial and accompany your description with drawings.

You and your partner will complete the chosen assignment and create a Web page in which you present all the components of your project. These Web pages will be viewed during a class exhibition which will take place on ________. (final due date)

Each Web page should consist of one main homepage, with three pages linked to it. The main homepage should include a brief introduction to your project and links to the three components of your project:

a. research
b. report on your findings
c. creative assignment

Each component should link back to the homepage. In addition, part a should link to part b, and part b should link to part c.

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Each page must include:

- a title
- list of required content
- necessary links
- relevant illustrations (No clip art. Give credit where necessary!)
- formatting which demonstrates thought and consideration—make sure the text is legible, that color enhances your Web page and does not distract from it, and that images are presented clearly (for example, on a plain background rather than a flashing or brilliantly colored background).

These assignments all produce insightful results, and the sharing of Web pages spawns lively comparisons and discussions if time allows.

Krista Ediger, McRoberts Secondary School, Richmond, British Columbia, Canada

EXCERPTS

Eavesdropping—and Other Everyday, Familiar Forms of Inquiry

This excerpt is reprinted from *Writing at the Threshold: Featuring 56 Ways to Prepare High School and College Students to Think and Write at the College Level* by Larry Weinstein *(NCTE, 2001)*

For some perverse reason, no everyday stimulus more consistently sets our wheels of inquiry turning than someone else's private business half-exposed to us. A compelling way to demonstrate to students that open-ended thinking comes naturally is to present them with the transcript of a real "half-dialogue" of someone at a public telephone, where the eavesdropper's first surmise concerning what is going on must give way to other, better understandings as more is said. (Either use one of the two partial transcripts below or plant yourself by a public phone somewhere and obtain one of your own to use.)

1. Briefly give the setting.
2. Read the transcript in segments of no more than two or three lines at a time.
3. At the end of each segment, simply say, "Thoughts?"
4. As students offer notions of what's happening, acknowledge these respectfully and name details that would seem to make such readings plausible.
5. Just as in [the previous exercise,] Sizing You Up, when the trial-and-error nature of the process is sufficiently manifest, congratulate your students. Tell the lot of them that they are natural inquirers, and break the act of inquiry into its parts to bring the point home. (Don't omit to say conclusively that they came up with their own questions, which were: "What is the relationship of one speaker to the other?" and "What's going on in the lives of the two people speaking, forming the context of their talk?" You, for your part, simply said, "Thoughts?")

Two Half-Dialogues

1. Near a gate at the Atlanta Airport, a man in his thirties wearing a business suit has just placed a call.

Hi, baby.
Oh yeah?
No. I'll be home soon, though.

Is your mother there?
She what?
Is she still at the game?
Go get your mother for me. Get your mother.

Hi there. I'm in Atlanta.
Well, you know, my session got out late and there was nothing direct.

How was the game?
Ohhh, that's too bad.

Who were we playing?

When did David come in?
Gave up some runs?
Huh. Is he sleeping?

2. In a corridor of the student center at Bentley College, a woman in her thirties wearing a dress suit has just placed a call at a public telephone.

Hello, may I speak with Mr. Foster please? Mr. Foster, this is Janet Johnson. I have a message that you called. What can I help you with?

Uh-huh. Yes. Hmm.

No, you cannot.

I don't think that that's a good excuse, not really. I expect my

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midterms to be taken more seriously than that.

No. You will get an F.

No, that is out of the question too.

Really?!

I think you'll find the Dean will see things as I do, but if you feel it's necessary, don't let me stop you.

Will you be in class today?

Fine. Good-bye.

Once the point (about the naturalness of inquiry) is made, make it yet again. Much that follows in this book is premised on your students' recognition of themselves as thinkers.

List a few of the numerous subjects of inquiry in everyday life:

- what implications the weather forecast has for an event planned for later in the day,
- why a saved computer file cannot be retrieved,
- how to get a large piece of furniture through a doorway,
- whom to vote for,
- how to let a certain person know that one has a romantic interest in him or her.

Most of these examples will ring bells for students generally. In addition, when you know your students well enough, you can add examples targeted to them as individuals. Well conceived, these ring louder bells. The student whose big sister's wedding is approaching will perk up at your suggestion that preparing invitation lists is inquiry. (The question "Whom should we invite?" generates numerous possible names, and these, in turn, are put through difficult tests.) The student who enjoys repairing cars will readily perceive how diagnosing automotive problems fits the model of good inquiry used here.

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NOTES

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For more information, visit http://www.englishsummerschools.co.uk, or contact Avril Meakin at AvrilMeakin@netscape.net, phone (0114) 266-0766, fax (0114) 268-7921, or write English Summer Schools, Apricot Villa, 10 Victoria Road, Sheffield, S10 2DL, United Kingdom.

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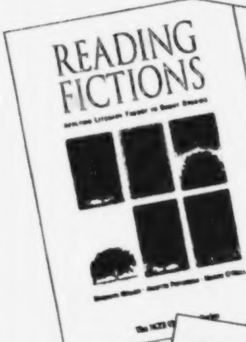

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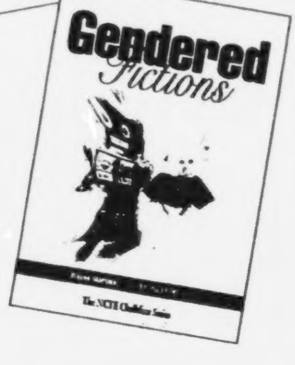

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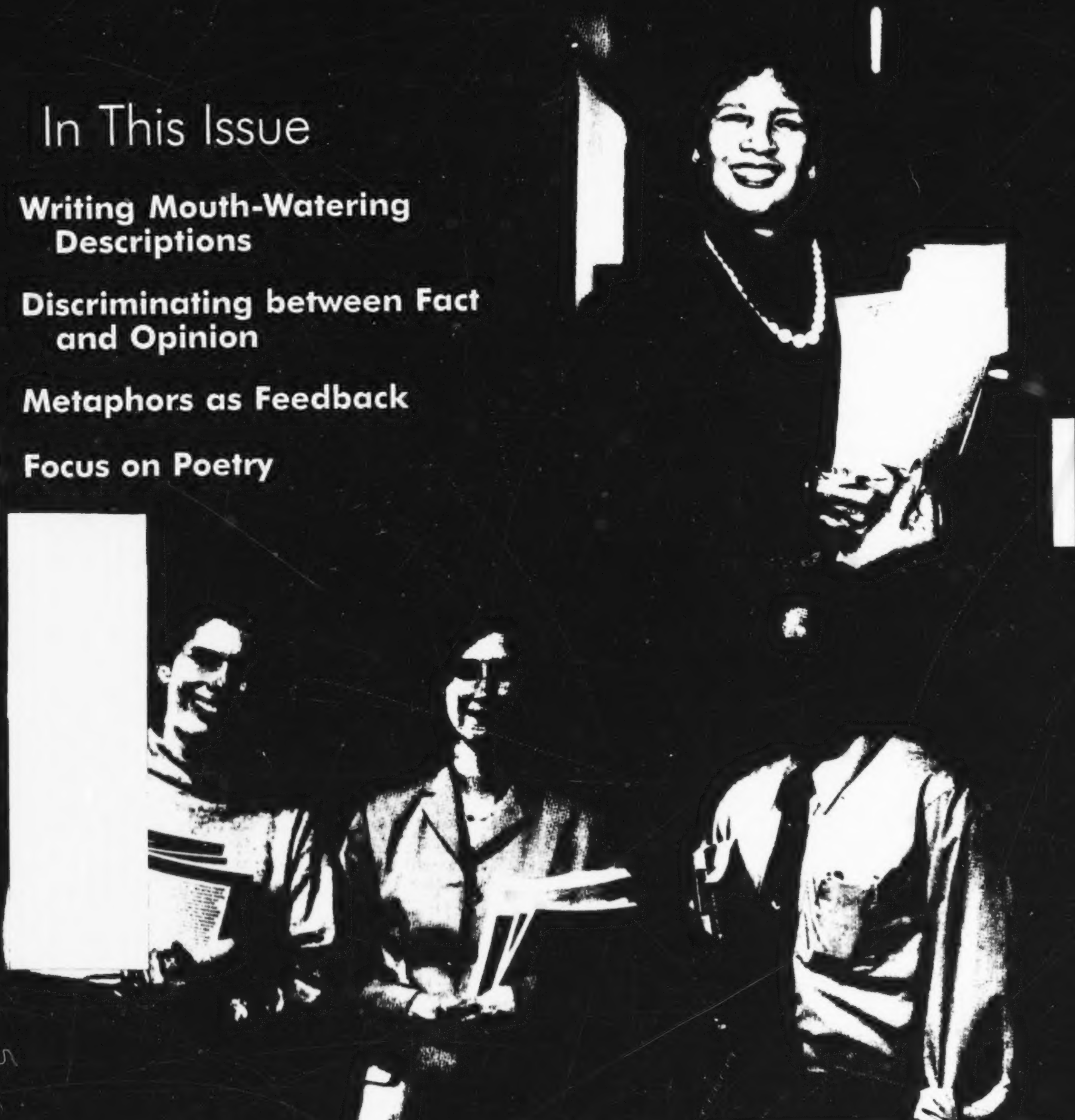

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I have never started a poem yet whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovering.

—Robert Frost

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Photos of Leila Flores Dueñas and Larry Johannessen by Bill Cronin, Cronin Photography

IDEAS FROM THE CLASSROOM

This issue of *Classroom Notes Plus* includes ideas for improving students' writing as well as ideas that focus on reading, though of course you'll quickly find the distinction to be somewhat illusory.

Among the classroom favorites included here are tips for helping students to give constructive feedback, to develop descriptive skills, to develop more complex sentences, and to spend time with a fictional character in preparation for writing a short story. Students will write or draw a record of a read-aloud session, look for connections between reading and life, practice discriminating between fact and opinion in reading nonfiction, and more.

And in honor of April's status as National Poetry Month, we include a poetry project in which students discover that they are all "found poets."

As usual, this spring issue also includes a topic index to make it easier for you to find your favorite strategies in the future.

Learning How to Give Constructive Feedback

One of the skills I emphasize in my seventh-grade writing classroom is revision. I teach the skills of revision and proofreading separately—revision being big changes to the content of a piece (adding in, taking out, reorganizing), and proofreading being small editing changes (checking carefully for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage mistakes).

For many years I found it difficult to get students to respond to their peers' writing pieces with thoughtful and meaningful feedback, but writing response groups have worked well for me.

Prior to our first writing response group, students write me a note and tell me the names of four to six classmates with whom they feel comfortable sharing their work. I arrange response groups of four to six students, honoring as many of their requests as possible. Students do end up working with their friends, but given the structure of this activity, they are rarely off-task. Furthermore, their comfort level with their friends makes it easier for them to share their drafts, to give honest feedback, and to take their friends' comments into consideration when they revise.

We use writing response groups when the rough draft of a piece of writing is due. The first time we use writing response groups, we discuss criticism, giving and getting feedback, and honesty. Then I explain the process:

- Students will move their desks into circles to be with their group, taking their drafts and a pen or a pencil with them.
- They'll pass their draft to the right, read their peer's draft silently, and write a half-page note to the writer.
- Then, when everyone finishes, students will pass their drafts to the right again, and repeat the process until the writer receives his or her draft back.

At first, some students have difficulty moving beyond the compliment, "good story." That's why I show them several examples of what the note should look like. I use student examples from previous years, such as the following:

> It was very good. But I do have a few suggestions. I think you should give more detail, describe the rooms maybe even draw a map of the "castle." I also think you should explain more about the "castle" disappearing. That was the only part I got confused about. I also think you should include some dialog between the brothers and sister. I think that would make it more interesting. Overall it looks pretty good.
>
> Nice story. I have a few comments. When the thoughts raced through your head, how would you know that Abreau would get a fly ball and win the game, unless you're telling it after it happened? Also, how did they try to reach the hat? Did they lay on their stomachs? What time did the game end and what time did you leave? Maybe you could add detail to the beginning of the story, like adding something about playing keep-away. You could go into detail over Matt's hat, explain why it's so nice.
>
> Wow! You described the story very well except for the temple. You should describe that more. Your story was very intense and I liked the part about the guy with the axe. I think Chris should slow down a bit. Make him walk when he is in the smoke. No kid could run that much. Why did all of the buses blow up when the first one did? Why did the first bus blow up? Was he invisible to everyone except the man? Not many people said anything to him.
>
> Wow! That was a really good excerpt from your story. Are these people being sent off to a concentration camp? Also, if they were "taking off the Jews' shackles," then how were her parents able to jump onto the train car? How did it feel to be in with so many people? Describe it more.
>
> Good part of a story Angie. I liked how you use the different people at the end as examples of how dreary and cold it really was. They drew me into the story and for a split second I felt like I could hear the man, the baby, and the person sharing and I felt a chill run through my body. Your ideas were fresh and original. A good thought: Maybe you could use a little more description such as it smelled and the expressions on the people's faces as she jumped in.

►

I also place several questions and sentence starters on the overhead, including the following:

- What questions do you have for the writer? What parts were confusing? What would you like to know more about?
- What suggestions do you have for the writer? What would improve this piece?
- I really liked how you . . .
- I think you should keep . . .
- A part that was confusing was . . .
- What did you mean by . . .
- I didn't understand . . .

As students work, I circulate among the groups and give encouragement to those who are having trouble filling the half-page of notebook paper.

Obviously, different students and different groups work at different paces. I encourage students to bring their writing notebooks or a reading workshop book to the circle, so that if they finish their half-page note early, they can work on something else productively.

Also, if one group finishes early, those students may read over their notes and quietly discuss any questions they had about the notes others wrote to them or about the drafts they read.

I work within a 42-minute period. The first time we do writing response groups, we only get two or three rotations of the drafts around a circle. In subsequent classes, as students become familiar with the process, they are able to rotate the drafts completely around their circle (five or six rotations) within the 42-minute period.

Sometimes, depending on the time, I'll have students finish with a reflection in their notebooks: "How did your writing response group go? Who gave you the best advice?"

Meredith A. Fisher, Martin Meylin Middle School, Lampeter, Pennsylvania

Writing Mouth-Watering Descriptions

When I began to integrate creative writing into my classroom, I encountered two problems that can make for a difficult learning environment— an unwillingness on the part of my students to share their written expression with others, and a reluctance to even put the entirety of their expression down on the page.

If these problems are allowed to continue, the classroom becomes stagnant in the fear of true self-expression. Students who do share are sometimes scoffed at or ridiculed. When I feel this is becoming a problem, or even as a pre-emptive strike to begin such a unit, I pull out my strawberry activity. The kids love it, I love it, and we're all so busy having fun, we forget entirely about fears of our own ability.

The first step is to go out the evening before and find the most delectable, ruby-red batch of strawberries you can find, at least one for each student, and about three lemons.

The following day in class, distribute blank sheets of paper and a paper towel to each student. It is then imperative to ask if anyone has any allergies to strawberries or—and I encourage you to promote this option—if anyone would like to volunteer to be bold during this activity.

To the majority of the class, those who did not raise their hands during the previous questions, pass out the strawberries with the one condition that no one may eat until you give the go-ahead. *All the tension and anticipation you can create in these opening moments will be rewarded by the students' rapt attention during the lesson, so don't be afraid of a little melodrama.*

Then, with your back to the class, cut the lemons into wedges and present these to the students who are allergic to strawberries or who have decided to deviate from the norm (I generally commend students for daring to be different).

Now, very slowly, very carefully, take the students through their five senses as they examine the fruit in front of them, recording every thought, every word, every association. With the lights dimmed, start with smell, then touch, then sight. Save the tasting for last, and don't forget to give students an opportunity to "hear" the fruit; you will be surprised at what some of them have to say.

It is fundamental however, that at each step, the exploration into their senses be focused on the one sense you want them to examine at that point—for instance, when students are asked to use the sense of smell, they must close their eyes and place their hands at their sides, concentrating only on their sense of smell. In addition, the room must remain totally quiet throughout the exercise.

Walk the students through all of their senses very slowly, very deliberately. Have them record every thought, every nuance of the fruit through each sense before you move on. I normally give the class about one minute to use a specific sense, and then two or three more to write their impressions down.

After the students have finished the exercise (and have eaten their fruit, if they wish), I ask for volunteers to share a few instances of their description. I accept sample descriptions until we have heard at least a couple really over-the-top descriptions, such as "The red, ripe, rubylicious bursting queen of color sits on my desk." I tell the class that that kind of description is exactly what I am looking for, not the mundane, "I have a strawberry on my desk." ▶

I generally break the class into groups of no more than three at this point and have each of the students record one very well described sentence or word that each person in their group has written. After everyone has shared in the small groups, I ask students to take turns writing on the board what they think is the best example of each of their group member's writing.

Before long we have a chalkboard littered with the absolute best, most detailed examples my students have to offer, and they have no reason to feel self-conscious because their peers were the ones who approved of it enough to place it on the board.

It doesn't take much after that to reveal to the students the difference in value between, "It's a strawberry . . . " and the sentences on the board that they are truly capable of. This exercise may not be a cure-all for lackluster descriptive writing, but it certainly identifies for the students what makes a sensory description rich and desirable, and what does not. From that point forward, the only motivating phrase I need to solicit more descriptive writing is a gentle reminder of the strawberry exercise, or to say to my students, "Make me hungry."

Theodore Hamilton, Plymouth Youth Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Shake Up Your Thinking

This activity helps students to write collaboratively in order to shake up their thinking, to allow them to see others' thoughts on the same subject, and to provide them with a "pre-writing" activity for a longer writing assignment. I have also used it for a discussion starter, in lieu of a quiz, or as a culminating activity for a work.

I got the original idea from Merrill Harmin in his book *INTERACTIVE STRATEGIES*, but I have modified the idea for my own purposes. I teach English methods and supervise student teachers; I have used this in my own classes, and my pre-service teachers have used it with students at all levels.

After students read a poem, short story, or novel (whether the entire novel or a chapter), ask them to think of one thing they know, believe, or feel about the literature and to write a sentence at the top of a page. They may have many questions about what they just read, but they should concentrate on what they can support or affirm. Example: After students have just read the first chapter of *THE SCARLET LETTER*, a student may write, "Hawthorne presents a very negative picture of the townspeople in this book."

Then students get into groups of four or five and pass their papers to the person next to them. Each person reads the sentence he or she has received and adds another sentence to the paper, adding detail, support from the text, or whatever seems appropriate.

After about two minutes, ask students to pass papers again. This continues around the circle with students reading and adding to the paper for as long as it seems productive (in a group of four or five, I like to send the papers around twice). The paper should end up with its original owner, who adds the concluding sentence.

Ask the students to read their finished papers to the rest of the group, and then each group chooses one paper to read aloud to the class.

I find that students are engaged by the comments of their peers, and that this activity usually helps stretch their thinking about their reading. It also seems to help students with the elaboration of ideas. Occasionally, as always, there will be a student who doesn't contribute meaningfully to the collaborative paper, but the other students usually will get the paper back on track. I have also conducted this activity in a large-class environment by passing papers down the rows. I have found that, if not overdone, it produces some quality ideas, and students seem to like the results. I know I do.

Kim Martin Long, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

Story Squares

In my reading and writing workshop, I enjoy sharing literature with my seventh-grade students during read-aloud time. Occasionally, I break a short story or novel up into eight to ten segments and read a little bit each day. I have found that some students have difficulty maintaining focus when they don't think they are accountable for the reading. Others tend to forget what happened in the story from one day to the next. I solved this problem through the creation of what I call "Story Squares."

At the beginning of the story, each student is given a sheet of tabloid-size (11" x 17") white paper. We fold the paper into squares according to the number of days I plan to be reading.

After read-aloud time each day, students are responsible for recording what happened in the story square for that day. I give them the option to write in narrative form or to draw or conceptualize the events or highlights from the reading artistically. Often, the completion of the day's square is the homework for the day. The paper conveniently folds up and can be easily transported. Though we don't ordinarily take class time to share or discuss our story squares until the reading is complete, each student should be prepared to talk about his or her representation when the time comes.

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I have used the Story Squares method with seventh graders of all ability levels. All students enjoy being able to express their understanding of a reading in a creative way, and the finished products serve as handy poster-size representations of the texts we have read aloud. I display as many of them as possible in the classroom.

Margaret A. Lee, Windsor Knolls Middle School, Ijamsville, Maryland

Getting to Know a Fictional Character

I use this exercise with my sophomores in conjunction with a short-story unit, during which they are assigned a short story as a writing project. The short story that we read immediately after the character is created is Toni Cade Bambara's *BLUES AIN'T NO MOCKINGBIRD*, which provides a marvelous rendering of a child's point of view.

Because this assignment requires that students create a character and spend time with him or her away from school, I usually assign it over our Thanksgiving break, but it could be assigned at another school break or even over a weekend.

Before the story is assigned, I read the following list of questions orally and ask students to answer them briefly in their writing journals.

1. Is your character male or female?
2. How old? How many are in his or her family?
3. Visualize your character in your mind's eye. Where do you see him or her?
4. Describe your character's hair color and hair style with more than one word.
5. Now think of a word or phrase for your character's eyes to describe them even more vividly. (e.g., if blue, *ice blue*)
6. What is your character wearing in the scene? Dress him or her from head to toe.
7. Are there any aromas or smells in the scene you are visualizing?
8. Are there sounds or music?
9. How does your character walk? Does he or she strut, swagger, shuffle?
10. How does your character greet people if he or she meets them in the hallway?
11. Describe your character's smile (e.g., *a toothless grin* for a first or second grader)
12. What is your character doing in this scene? Sleeping? Playing a game? Practicing an instrument? Working on a hobby?
13. Describe the build of your character. Is he or she strong and sturdy? thin and willowy?
14. What is your character's favorite place to shop?
15. What is your character's favorite food or favorite restaurant?
16. What is his or her favorite movie or TV show?
17. What is your character's most outstanding or unique personality trait or quirk?
18. What was the worst trouble your character ever got into or most serious mistake he or she ever made?
19. Was anyone hurt by this incident? If so, who and how?
20. Was your character punished? Was he or she changed by the incident?
21. Why did he do it? In other words, motivate your character.
22. Describe how you and your character disagree on an issue.

These questions can be modified to your and your students' interests and backgrounds.

I tell students: "You will be living with your character for the next ____ days. Take him or her with you to your friend's house, Grandma's house, the mall, the movies, the grocery store, Florida, the Bahamas, or wherever else you go during this time period. You will keep a diary-type journal of his or her reactions to everything you do, approximately 100 words per day. These daily journals are due when we return to class."

This exercise provides students valuable practice in understanding and adopting a character's point of view and provides pre-writing that often produces a well-rounded, well-motivated, consistent character to populate their short stories.

I look forward to the fun of reading these journals, and my students are usually enthusiastic about the assignment. They always seem to have fun designing this "imaginary friend" and getting in touch with the taproot of their childhood creativity.

Susan Altland, Hershey High School, Hershey, Pennsylvania

Sentence Combining for Complexity

I first developed this lesson plan to accommodate my eighth-grade students who wanted grammar lessons to involve more group work. Their writing was generally choppy

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and full of simple sentences, so I wanted them to practice combining sentences without completing repetitive text exercises.

One of the best benefits of this activity for me was that students of all ability levels participated and took leadership roles in their groups. I have since used this plan successfully with seventh graders as well and hope that it might be adaptable to other classrooms. I have also discovered that Barry Lane published a similar activity for elementary students in *AFTER THE END: TEACHING AND LEARNING CREATIVE REVISION* (Heinemann, 1993).

The general plan is for students to rewrite children's books in small groups by using sentence combining techniques. Their revised stories can be written on the chalkboard or on overheads for sharing with the class. After the activity, direct students to reread one of the pieces they are currently writing and highlight areas where they could revise into complex sentences.

The first step is to gather enough children's books to have one for every three or four students. The public library usually has a large selection, or an elementary school librarian may be able to help make selections. Books that work the best are ones which have short sentences in which each adds to the next, and not too much repetition of only one word or idea.

Supply blank overheads and markers—one of each per group. I once had students write their group work on the chalkboard, but I prefer an overhead because they can still present their work to the class while also providing me with a tangible record of their class work for the day.

Next, introduce or review various methods for combining sentences. This will vary depending on the level of your students' writing abilities—it could be as simple as a lesson on conjunctions or it might include constructing adjective phrases or other more complex structures.

Explain that children's books are written very simply because they need to be easier to read and understand. Each group of three or four students will rewrite a children's book keeping in mind the lesson on sentence combining. Students are not required to rewrite every sentence, but they are asked to keep all of the book's original ideas.

Supply each group with a book, overhead, and marker. After about 20 minutes, have groups present their work to the class. Let the class help you compare the rewritten text with the original, make comments, highlight any omitted ideas, note similarities and differences, offer other possibilities, and so on.

Relate this lesson to the students' own writing by having them reread a current piece of writing, highlight, and then rewrite a section which they feel could be improved by combining or restructuring their sentences. The goal is for them to continue to practice the lesson in their own writing. Highlighting a specific section is especially effective because students' revision efforts are focused—by breaking up a longer work, students do not feel so overwhelmed by the task.

Kathryn Parrott, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma

Metaphors as Feedback

Students are often reluctant to assess each other's work, but they will readily give what Peter Elbow describes as "reader-based feedback." (*WRITING WITH POWER*. Oxford University Press, 1998.) I have had a lot of success in having students respond to each other's fiction using metaphors.

When students read each others' stories, they begin by noting what words, images, sentences, or paragraphs struck them and why. Then students come up with a metaphor that describes something about their own experience of reading the story. I have found that writing a metaphor allows students to express the strengths and shortcomings of a piece of writing with more honesty than they are comfortable doing in direct speech.

For example, one student wrote, "This story is like dinosaurs moving in the dark." When asked to explain, he said, "I know there are big things happening, but I can't see them." Sometimes students write not a metaphor, but a comparison, and the writer then realizes that his or her story is not original ("This story is like *UNBREAKABLE*.").

Before students give reader-based feedback for the first time, I give them a short lesson on the distinction Elbow makes between "criterion-based feedback" and "reader-based feedback." I emphasize that in workshop, we are not judging writing according to a fixed criterion or rubric, but are trying to let the writer know how the writing affected us. It is then up to the writer to creatively solve any problems in the piece.

I collect the feedback and metaphors and encourage students who have not given enough feedback to write something about their own experience of reading. In the end, responding to the other students' writing becomes a creative endeavor in itself—a chance to show the writer how much the reader listened.

Mary T. Lane, Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, Maryland

The Connections Concept

"Katie, can you describe the internal conflict that Brutus struggles with while deciding whether to kill Caesar?"

"I dunno. Why do I have to read Shakespeare anyway?," Katie asks. "It doesn't have anything to do with me." ▶

This is the battle fought in classrooms across the country. Whether it is Shakespeare, Steinbeck, or another author, students often fail to find relevancy in the English curriculum.

I was fortunate enough to have a college professor who urged future teachers to implement the work of theorists George Hillocks, Peter Smagorinsky, and Michael Smith. As a result, I have utilized techniques such as autobiographical writing before reading, opinion surveys, scenarios, and case studies effectively in my classroom over the years. Well-thought-out pre-reading activities help students comprehend how closely the themes in a variety of literature actually touch their lives.

Last year I tried a post-reading activity that proved an excellent supplement to traditional testing, essay writing, and student projects. I called the idea "Connections."

Since my course is thematically based, I am always trying to get the students to notice similarities between various works we have studied. To implement the program I purchased eleven sheets of poster board and printed a large letter on the top of each board. Lined up next to each other, the boards spelled out the word "Connections."

Once the system was in place, I explained to students that they could raise their hands to offer a connection at any time. They would then write the connection on the current poster board, which, when filled up was displayed above the chalkboard in front of the room.

What I found was that students not only connected literary works to one another but also made connections to articles they read in newspapers and magazines, items they saw on television or in films, and, most importantly, to events in their own lives.

For example, one student connected themes from *Animal Farm* to those in *Lord of the Flies*. Another student brought in a *Chicago Tribune* article that made reference to Carl Sandburg's "Chicago." One student shared that John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* was the subject of a question on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" And then there was the student who told the class of how his mom and aunt stayed up half the night plotting against another aunt. "It was just like Brutus and Cassius," he told the class.

Connection fever soon spread. Students were now thinking about English class on their own time! On Mondays, it was commonplace to have five hands raised signaling the proud announcement of a connection discovered over the weekend. Filling all eleven boards was not a problem. By the end of the year, we ran out of room and had to start writing and taping articles on the poster backs. Almost every student in the class contributed to the finished product, which I had laminated at the close of the school year.

On the final essay of the year, students wrote about the most memorable aspects of our class. Paper after paper praised the connections concept. One student commented on how the connections method allowed her to open up and participate: "I really liked making connections but at first I was shy to raise my hand. Then I made so many connections. Now I don't think I'll ever stop making connections."

Another student pointed out how connections helped students retain information—an important pedagogical goal: "The connection boards are one of the greatest things that we did this year because the other classes that are in the same room get to see what we have been doing all year long. It actually proves that we learned something and retained it!"

Finally, a student wrote about how connections would have a continuing impact on her: "Even though we won't be in English this summer, I know for sure that my summer will be filled with connections galore."

One component of my district's vision statement is to produce "lifelong learners." I feel that the connections concept is one way to achieve that admirable goal.

Michael Sullivan, Willowbrook High School,
Villa Park, Illinois

Discriminating between Fact and Opinion

Many middle school students are at the developmental stage where they tend to believe that anything published in a book must be "true" exactly as stated. This is especially true when students read nonfiction works. This activity gets them thinking about how much influence the author has over his or her subject, and how facts can be presented straightforwardly or filtered through a point of view. This hands-on activity generates enthusiastic discussion among the students, and a greater understanding that nonfiction, while factual, often comes with a degree of opinion.

I use this activity for a block-schedule class, but it could be easily modified for one or two regular class periods.

I bring in 30 or 40 nonfiction books of all types—books on travel, history, art, transportation, politics, careers, sports, as well as biographies and memoirs—the wider the range of topics, the better.

I like to mix in as many high-interest books as I can find and add a couple of books that I think are really dull for contrast. I use many books from my personal library, as well as books from the classroom collection and the school's media center. Most of the books are available for check-out when all classes have finished the activity.

This year I also added to the book pool by asking students each to bring in one nonfiction book from home, if their parents agreed. ▶

I start the activity by spending about 15 minutes going over four or five of the books with the whole class, asking them questions concerning the book's purpose, audience, author, method of presentation, and so on.

We discuss the authors and speculate on their particular point of view and how it might affect the content of the book. For instance, if we're reviewing a book about a mountain climbing trip, we might note if the author was an actual participant of the trip or if he or she interviewed someone else for information. If the book is a biography of a celebrity, we look at the credits and acknowledgments and notice if the celebrity, family members and friends were interviewed, or if the author takes information from second- or third-hand sources. Book dedications also offer insights: One book on firefighting was dedicated to the author's husband, a firefighter. This explained the admiration that came through the text and the pictures the author chose to include.

We also look for opinion words like "think," "feel," "believe," "speculate," and phrases such as "It has been suggested," "In my view," "I can't help but wonder," and so on. I explain that these are indicators that the author is going to stray from objective fact to provide an opinion or idea, and that these parts of the text cannot be considered facts.

I divide the remaining books among five groups of students and allow them about 30 minutes to browse through them. I distribute copies of the handout sheet on page 9 and ask them to answer the questions and rate the books for the level of opinion and fact.

Sometimes I will ask each student to present one of the books to the class, describing the book and explaining what conclusions they have been able to reach about this level of fact and opinion. Other times, I ask groups to present a few books each.

Either method always generates lively discussion and often results in students competing over who gets to check out particular books at the end of the period.

Here are examples of some of the facts and opinions my students identified from books we used:

- from *FIRE IN THEIR EYES* by Karen Magnuson Beil

  FACT: "Chaparral is a dense thicket of shrubs and plants that have flammable oils."

  OPINION: "Tracy Dunford and members of his crew took a well-earned rest."

- from *THE GUINNESS BOOK OF WORLD RECORDS*

  FACT: In March 1997 Levi Strauss and Co. paid $25,000 to buy a pair of their own Levi 501 jeans."

  OPINION: "Reinhold Messner was one of history's greatest pioneers."

- from *MUMMIES* by Charlotte Wilcox

  FACT: "Thousands of mummies exist today."

  FACT: "Before mummification, the organs must be removed."

  OPINION: "The men were extremely brave."

- from *50 NIFTY SUPER THINGS TO DO AFTER SCHOOL* by Beth Pickett

  FACT: ". . . bleach can stain clothing."

  OPINION: "This is really great fun."

- from *HORROR MOVIES* by Daniel Cohen

  FACT: "Lon Chaney migrated to Hollywood around 1930."

  FACT: "In the l940s Lewton was hired by RKO to produce a series of low budget horror films."

  OPINION: "The film should be better known today, and perhaps it would be, but for its fatal flaw . . ."

- from *WESTWARD WITH COLUMBUS* by John Dyson

  FACT: "Columbus sailed back to the New World in command of a fleet of seventeen ships."

  OPINION: "I could easily imagine the tall figure of the admiral standing on the poop deck, his white hair streaming in the wind."

- from *THE CARBOHYDRATE ADDICT'S DIET* by Drs. Rachael and Richard F. Heller

  FACT: "Water is essential to your health."

  OPINION: "It doesn't feel like real food."

Eileen Talbett, Robinson Middle School, Fairfax, Virginia

ROMEO AND JULIET—One More Story with an Unhappy Ending

My freshmen class this year wasn't very excited about the prospect of studying *ROMEO AND JULIET*. They displayed little enthusiasm while reading and didn't even show their usual anticipation about viewing a video—in fact, during Zeferelli's film, they laughed at the actors, yawned excessively, and tried to prepare sleeping pallets on their desks.

I was disappointed by their reactions, but still hoped to find some way to help them make connections with the characters and themes in this classic work.

Then I reflected on my students' earlier suggestions for journal writing ideas. I had asked students to fill out a questionnaire at the beginning of the year to learn their inter-

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Discriminating between Fact and Opinion

Name ______________________________
Date ______________________________
Class Period __________________________

Select a book of nonfiction from those provided and spend about ten minutes browsing through it. Then answer the questions below.

Name of book ____
Author ____
Subject ____
Copyright date ____

1. Describe the book in three to five sentences. ______________________________
____
____
____

2. Find two examples of facts from the book. ______________________________
____

3. Find two examples of opinions from the book. (Some books may have no opinion, but look for opinion words.) ______________________________
____

4. What is this book's intended audience? ______________________________
____

5. How might the reader use this book? ______________________________
____
____

6. What is the author's position or background? How might this influence the contents of the book?
____
____

7. On a scale of one to ten, rate this book on the degree of objectivity, with one representing a very objective book (based in facts), and ten representing a very subjective book (based in opinions). Place an X on the line to show where you think the book falls.

1______2______3______4______5______6______7______8______9______10

(objective) (subjective)

ests, and I remembered that on the questionnaire, many students revealed a desire to write about "happy things," not violence, gangs, or other tragedies.

The request centered on the fact that many of my students live in neighborhoods where violent acts occur frequently. Perhaps, I reasoned, to my students ROMEO AND JULIET symbolized just one more story with an unhappy ending.

I realized that I had never even considered the idea of Romeo and Juliet living happily ever after, and I decided to ask students to turn Romeo and Juliet from a tragedy to a story with a happy ending, and to celebrate with the couple by hosting a wedding reception for them.

I wondered if this idea would be met with more sighs, but instead, students were excited and enthusiastic. I explained that to justify our plans for a wedding reception, first we would talk about ways to rewrite the ending of the story. Each student would be asked to write a new ending that culminated in a wedding reception.

In addition, we would all take on new names and personalities as reception guests, and each student would be asked to develop a brief (1–2 minute) oral presentation that tied in with the time period and theme and to present it as part of the reception.

When we reached the point of discussing plans for the actual reception, students wanted to know what foods they could eat. Some suggested Kool-Aid wine, cake, nuts, etc. A lively class discussion focused upon the foods that Romeo and Juliet would have probably selected for a reception.

In addition, we discussed how any reception food we served at school could not violate the district's policy on hepatitis prevention, and would need to be individually wrapped or prepared by the cafeteria staff.

I encouraged students to think of ways to make the reception reflect an actual reception. I selected two reliable students to serve as wedding coordinators. The coordinators were responsible for developing activities, seeking total class input, compiling the reception program, and keeping me informed.

The class voted to schedule the reception in the cafeteria on Shakespeare's birthday. Students used secret ballots to elect a Romeo and a Juliet. Next, each student selected an English name by adding Lord or Lady before a newly selected surname.

Not many supplies were needed for the reception. I brought some decorations from home, and students volunteered to bring paper plates, napkins, and other props.

I purchased some flowery computer paper for the program and plastic champagne glasses from a discount store. I bought non-alcoholic grape juice in champagne bottles from the grocery store.

An enthusiastic cafeteria staff prepared a beautifully decorated cake for a nominal fee. Coordinators typed the program and created invitations that were hand-delivered to the principal, curriculum supervisor, and select (students' choice) teachers within the building.

On Shakespeare's birthday, students and guests entered the cafeteria and listened to the melodious sounds of classical music.

Then, each Lord and Lady signed the guest book and was presented a personalized button. Each button depicted a red rose, the Lord or Lady's name typed in Old English font, and the heading: "Romeo and Juliet's Wedding Reception."

Next, students were asked to make an imaginary menu selection from the two attractively displayed menus created earlier by their peers. Then each student was given a copy of the reception program and seated at a table with a candy dish centerpiece. A smiling Romeo and Juliet were already seated at a table decorated with a bust of Shakespeare.

The program was unforgettable. One Lord told guests about the history of Verona. A Lady informed guests about the life of Shakespeare. The Prince welcomed everyone to the ceremony. Capulets, Montagues, and guests creatively uttered abundant blessings for the happy couple. Two students voluntarily memorized and recited significant passages from *Romeo and Juliet*. Guests listened to a classical CD while the happy couple danced. Our adult guests voiced congratulatory expressions to the couple. And after the Friar's touching toast to the happy couple, everyone drank "wine" and ate wedding cake.

The wedding reception idea was a great success. The "happy ending" provided a means for students to experience and even participate in one of Shakespeare's greatest literary works in a way that connected to their own lives.

Sherrill Y. Rayford, Gateway Institute of Technology, St. Louis, Missouri

Photographs from Shakespeare Plays

A new resource is available for students studying the works of Shakespeare. Visit the Web address below for the Cleveland Press Shakespeare Photographs, 1870–1982: Photographs from the plays of William Shakespeare on stage, screen, television, opera, and ballet.

http://www.ulib.csuohio.edu/shakespeare

Lesley Jorbin
Humanities and Music Librarian
Cleveland State University Library
l.jorbin@csuohio.edu

FOCUS ON POETRY

Found Poets

Picture a group of eighth graders gathered together sharing poetry and enjoying themselves. They are energized. They are focused. In the media center of Sawgrass Springs Middle School, these three eighth graders are playing "The Weary Blues" on their instruments while one of the students sings Langston Hughes' famous poem for our class. This is how three of my students invited the rest of the class into the Harlem Renaissance.

Teaching poetry so that my students enjoy it and see its relevance to their lives is an important aspect of my curriculum. Each year during March, I teach and experience poetry with my classes by introducing a collaborative poetry project.

This project encompasses research and cross-curricular connections. It engages the students emotionally. As my students develop their projects, they climb the ladder of Bloom's Taxonomy, working from knowledge and comprehension to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

The project culminates with the class sharing dramatic readings of their poetry accompanied by the use of either a creatively decorated show board or a power point presentation. When National Poetry Month is celebrated during April, my students continue their journey by writing original poems of their own.

I begin the project by assigning the students to groups of four. I try to arrange it so that each group contains students with varying levels of ability. I also place the more introverted students with the more extroverted students.

On the board I have listed the names of the poets that my school district, Broward County, Florida, assigns as core curriculum: Langston Hughes, Walt Whitman, and Robert Frost.

We brainstorm for additional poets we would like to either investigate or hear presented. (Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe, and Shel Silverstein are popular class add-ons.)

Then each group is given a ticket that assigns their number for the poet lottery. As I call the numbers, the groups select the poet that they will be investigating and presenting.

The groups are given the assignment of investigating the life and historical times of the poet. They are to select two poems and complete a literary analysis of each poem. This analysis is displayed on their visual, which is either a Power Point presentation or a decorative show board.

Our school is fortunate to have a media specialist who is very supportive—Mrs. Gellers assists the students in perfecting their Power Point presentations by offering a before-school help session.

The literary analysis of the poetry incorporates Bloom's Taxonomy. Working in their groups, students are asked to do the following:

1. Restate the poem in prose, in one or two paragraphs.
2. Tell how the poem's theme applies to their lives.
3. Apply some aspect of the poem to the world today.
4. Analyze the literary devices within the poem.
5. Compare and contrast the two poems the group selected to present.
6. Evaluate the poems and explain the group's overall reaction to the poem.
7. Create a visual response to the poem. This may be a sketch, watercolor, or created artifact.
8. Each group member is asked to write a poem as a response to the poems studied together. These original poems are placed into a booklet as a keepsake of their collaborative work.
9. Introduce the class to the life of the poet and the historical time in which he or she lived.

While we are involved in this poetry project, I open each class with a mini-lesson on the lives of the poets, or show a film clip of poets speaking about poetry or reading their own works. I also review and teach various aspects of poetry and figurative language. We review simile, metaphor, alliteration and onomatopoeia. We revisit concrete poetry, the limerick, haiku, and free verse.

But the majority of the teaching takes place within the groups as they investigate and pull together their projects. When we hold our class in the media center and share presentations, the students are exhilarated. Comparing, analyzing, and sharing the poets' works enables my students to "live" their poems. Students are especially proud of their own original poems created as a response to the poems they studied and presented—poems which take many forms, including limericks, concrete poems, haiku, and free verse.

I feel a wonderful sense of accomplishment when my students tell me how much they enjoy this project. The overwhelming response to this project is that "poetry is fun!" I feel particularly good when I observe reluctant readers or writers engrossed in their research and filled with pride when they write their original poetry. I've also observed that this project helps students discover that writing poetry can be an effective personal response to everyday problems and struggles.

Here's a final testimonial: Last June, my department head was a chaperone on the end-of-year field trip and sat with three eighth-grade boys from my class. She said they explained their recently completed poetry project to her in great detail, and she had never heard boys that age talk about language arts with such fervor and enthusiasm.

Following this project, I tell my students they are Found Poets!

Kathleen M. Elias, Sawgrass Springs Middle School, Coral Springs, Florida

TRACI'S LISTS OF TEN

Ten National Poetry Month Activities

"Traci's Lists of Ten" are lists of thoughtful teaching tips created by Traci Gardner, a former English teacher and now Online Resources Manager for NCTE. To read more of "Traci's Lists of Ten," visit

http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/index.shtml

This excerpt is taken from "Traci's 35th List of Ten: Ten National Poetry Month Activities." To read that list in its entirety, visit

http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/035.shtml

7. [DESIGN A CELEBRATION] The Academy of American Poets established National Poetry Month with seven goals in mind — the first of which is "to highlight the extraordinary legacy and ongoing achievement of American poets" (All seven goals are available at http://www.poets.org/npm/faq.cfm#5 and you can find more information about National Poetry Month at http://www.poets.org/npm/). Not everyone agrees that the month succeeds in its goals. In his article "Against National Poetry Month As Such," poet and author Charles Bernstein argues that the way that poetry is defined for the purpose of National Poetry Month is unnecessarily limiting. Bernstein states, "National Poetry Month is about making poetry safe for readers by promoting examples of the art form at its most bland and its most morally 'positive.'" (Bernstein's article is at http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/044106.html).

Given this background, here's your job: write a proposal for a National Poetry Month Celebration at your school, a local community center, or similar forum that fulfills the goals that the Academy set for the month while avoiding the pitfalls that Bernstein outlines. Your proposal will probably include the following parts: Introduction & Background, Objectives for the Celebration, Implementation, and Costs.

[Alternatives: Have students write a persuasive paper that agrees or disagrees with Bernstein's criticisms. Have students actually plan and present/lead a celebration for their school.]

U.S. Poet Laureate Launches Poetry Web Site

U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins has launched a new Web site, called Poetry 180, designed to encourage the appreciation and enjoyment of poetry in America's high schools. The site is featured on the Library of Congress's home page at http://www.lc.gov/poetry/180.

The site will contain the text of 180 poems selected by Collins (one for each day of the school year), suggestions for presenting poems, and tips for reading a poem aloud. Most of the poems presented on the site were written by contemporary American authors and were selected with a high school audience in mind. The poems were chosen to be accessible upon first hearing, although students may wish to download them from the Web site for later reading.

"The idea behind Poetry 180 is simple—to have a poem read each day to the student bodies of American high schools across the country," said Collins.

A message from Collins on the site "to the high school teachers of America" urges them to select someone to read the poem to the school each day, perhaps at the end of daily announcements over a public address system or by teachers in their individual homerooms. "The hope," writes Mr. Collins, "is that poetry will become a part of the daily life of students in addition to being a subject that is part of the school curriculum."

Collins, who has authored many books of poetry and been awarded numerous honors for his writing, was named Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in May 2001. The Poet Laureate is appointed for a one-year term, subject to renewal for another year.

TEACHER TALK

Coming of Age

I am trying to put together a unit on "coming of age." Do you have any suggestions for poems, short stories, and novels I should use?

Amanda Lanz
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My favorite short story for this kind of unit is "Marigolds" by Eugenia Collier. Her descriptions of the very moment at which she destroyed her youth and moved into adulthood are astounding.

Other great stories for the same unit are "Through the Tunnel" by Doris Lessing and "Sixteen" by Maureen Daly.

Poems I like for the topic:

"Hanging Fire," Audre Lorde
"Those Winter Sundays," Robert Hayden
"Birches," Robert Frost
"Seniors," Alberto Rios (not appropriate for all ages)
"Running on Empty," Robert Phillips
"There Was a Child Went Forth," Walt Whitman
"Fern Hill," Dylan Thomas
"Anthem for Doomed Youth," Wilfred Owens (sort of an anti-topic poem—these kids aren't coming of age)
"My Son, My Executioner," Donald Hall (parent perspective on coming of age)

Del Hughes
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I have started doing a coming-of-age thematic unit with my 10th graders. We read "Marigolds" by Eugenia Collier, "Shaving" by Leslie Norris, "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" by Richard Wright, and "Through the Tunnel" by Doris Lessing. We also do *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, although next year I'd like to offer it as a choice for literature circles. These short stories provide excellent compare/contrast opportunities.

I also have the kids research an adolescent issue or problem (teen pregnancy, drug abuse, etc.) using various kinds of resources. I ask them to find facts about the problem (statistics), effects of the problem on teenagers' growth and development, and possible solutions posited in the research. I do ask them to do note cards because we have a required research paper in the spring, so this is a good way to start learning traditional research methods and tools. They create a visual aid and talk to the class about their findings. I've also had kids interview adults about what it was like to grow up in their youth. This activity proved very popular.

Some of my kids read *Celine* independently and liked it. I haven't had time to investigate it as a possible choice. *Jacob Have I Loved*, although perhaps more for middle school, is another one that comes to mind.

Deborah L. Beezley
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Novels:

To Kill A Mockingbird
Ellen Foster
Montana 1948
The House On Mango Street
Snow In August

Plays:

Master Harold and . . . the Boys
Fences

Anne J. Arvidson
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There is a cool anthology published by The National Textbook Company, I think, called *Coming of Age*. Good stories by good authors.

Nancy Patterson
patter@voyager.net

Here are some Coming of Age ideas.

Short Stories:

Coming of Age, National Textbook Company
"A Brief Moment in the Life of Angus Bethune," Cris Crutcher
"Sucker," Carson McCullers
"Raymond's Run," Toni Cade Bambara
"Broken Chain," Gary Soto
"The Bass, The River, and Sheila Mant," W.D. Wetherell
"I Go Along," Richard Peck
"And Summer Is Gone," Susie Kretschmer
"Graduation," Maya Angelou

Novels:

The House On Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros
Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger
The Chosen, Chaim Potok
Coffee Will Make You Black, April Sinclair
It Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America, Nathan McCall

Films:

Stand By Me (VHS)
The Year My Voice Broke (VHS)

Rod Merrell
rmerrell@coup.wednet.edu

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One of the finest Coming of Age novels I've read in a long time is *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy.

Patricia Schulze
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Try a collection of short stories about youth and adolescence edited by Bruce Emra called *Coming of Age*. It's got such great writers as Margaret Atwood, Robert Cormier, Jamaica Kincaid, Sylvia Plath, Anne Tyler, Amy Tan, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers and Toni Cade Bambara all under one cover.

Adrienne Rose
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It's period, but I find it easy to relate to A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, by Betty Smith, which also has a film (possibly rental from Blockbuster) that was made, based on the novel.

The language isn't too difficult, and story is simplistic enough—but has many deeper meanings—I loved it when it first came out. I still love it 50 years later. I plan to buy it this summer and give it to my visiting 11-year-old grandchild.

It is told from the point of view of the 12-year-old girl, and then as she grows up, the insights deepen. It ends when she is 18 and going away to college, just before WW I. That is I, not II.

Try Blockbuster for the film, which is a classic, and which won Peggy Ann Gardner an Oscar. I'd think your local library would have the book.

I don't know how the boys will relate. How about The Yearling as an alternate for them? Other novels—Jessamyn West had a novel or short stories about Cress Delehanty, who was growing up in the orange groves of inland California.

If you can discuss religion in the classroom, and I think you'd have to, Chaim Potok's The Chosen, which deals with an 11-year-old and his new friend. Much in any of these will lend itself to involvement and discussion, even if part of the discussion is the contrast in periods and challenges and risks between then and now.

Janet Bone
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EXCERPTS

What Do I Teach for 90 Minutes?

If your school is considering a move to block scheduling, or if you're already on the block and want advice, you'll find What Do I Teach for 90 Minutes? Creating a Successful Block-Scheduled English Classroom essential reading. With examples from one high school's experience, this book addresses everything from initial preparation to ongoing revision of an existing block-scheduled program.

The following excerpt is taken from Chapter 2 of What Do I Teach for 90 Minutes?

One Teacher's Experimentation

Brad, one MHS English teacher who was already approaching the study of literature from a reading process perspective, wanted to learn more about literature discussions and student reflection to prepare for the block schedule.

Since he felt that the new schedule would offer more opportunities for students to talk in small groups about the books they were reading, he decided he needed to improve the quality of their interactions and increase his knowledge of how to support this type of work. But he didn't want literature discussions to be a structure that was imposed on his students; rather, he wanted students to reflect on their discussions and then use these reflections to decide what types of interactions supported and enhanced their understanding of the text, and which interactions interfered.

During the semester before moving to the block, and while still teaching fifty-minute classes, Brad secured six tape recorders, and students made tapes of their discussions. During the class period following these discussions, students created transcripts in their groups by listening to their own tape and having each person write what he or she had said. Each comment or question was numbered to show the order in which the various remarks were made. Next, the students identified the places where the discussion seemed to "fall apart" and those places where their talk led to some "great ideas," and these portions of the transcript were compared to see how they were different. Students' insights and conclusions were then discussed with the teacher. After these self-evaluations and process discussions, Brad worked with the students to set group and individual goals for their future discussions.

To order this book, call the NCTE Customer Service Department at 1-800-369-6283. Stock #56533. Price: $19.95 (member); $24.95 (nonmember).

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NOTES

TV-Turnoff Week

On April 22–28, 2002, millions of people nationwide will voluntarily turn off their TV sets for a week. The TV-Turnoff Network sponsors TV-Turnoff Week in order to encourage people to watch less TV and to promote healthy lifestyles and communities. To learn how you can be more involved, visit http://www.tvfa.org/week.htm.

Humanities Abroad

Each summer Humanities Abroad offers two- and three-week summer programs in literature, history, and the arts. The sites for the 2002 programs include Crete, Dublin, Cambridge, Florence, and Tuscany. For more information, visit http://www.humanitiesabroad.com, call 1-800-754-9991, or e-mail humabroad@earthlink.net.

AP Central Web Site

The College Board has launched a new Web site for Advanced Placement professionals at http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com. The AP Central Web site offers the most up-to-date and comprehensive information on AP courses and exams, as well as unique resources and tools to help administrators and teachers get started with an AP program, and to enable seasoned AP professionals to further strengthen their respective AP curricula.

Ancestral Tours to Great Britain

Ancestral Tours to Great Britain, Ltd. promotes tours to England that introduce its participants to the unexpected side of England's history through family genealogy and a truly unique form of literature—Nursery Rhymes. For more information on these tours, visit http://www.ancestraltours.com.

Ayn Rand Institute Contests

The Ayn Rand Institute is sponsoring essay contests for high school and college students. The contests focus on specific works of Ayn Rand. For more information, visit http://www.aynrand.org/contests/.

The CELEBRATIONS Book Series

The publishers of the *CELEBRATIONS* book series are accepting submissions of letters celebrating loved ones or special individuals. The series will contain 35 books of letters from people of all ages. For more information, visit http://www.thedawkinsproject.com.

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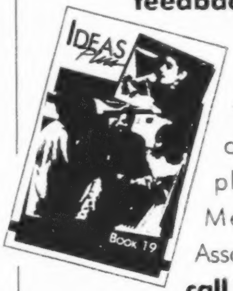
CLASSROOM NOTES



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Bronwyn Mellor, Marnie O'Neill, and Annette Patterson

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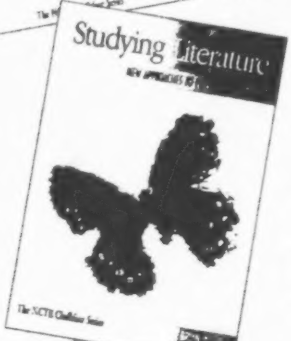

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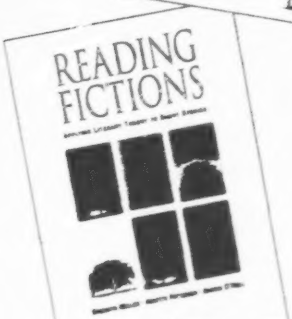

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